THE TEMPLE SERIES OF BIBLE CHARACTERS & SCRIPTURE HANDBOOKS

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MARTYRS & THEIR PERSECUTIONS

BY THE REV. PROF. HERKLESS D.D.

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THE TEMPLE SERIES
OF BIBLE HANDBOOKS
EDITED BY
OLIPHANT SMEATON, M.A.

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

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(*Alinari.*)

St James.

From the Painting by Spinello Aretino in the Church of S. Domenico, Arezzo.

THE EARLY CHRISTIAN MARTYRS

AND

THEIR PERSECUTIONS

BY

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CHAPTER I

THE Day of Pentecost, on which the disciples of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth were assembled in Jerusalem, may be taken as the date of the foundation of the Christian Church. In His last interview with the apostles the Lord commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem till they had received the promise of the Father; and He made known to them how, after the Holy Ghost had come upon them, they should be witnesses of Him in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. As soon as Pentecost with its mysteries was past, the apostles, with Peter as chief among them, began to preach the Gospel received from the lips of their Master, to testify to His rising from the grave, and to teach the new doctrine of the resurrection through Him from the dead. The Jews, who by the action of their leaders and the shouts of the people had brought Jesus to the cross, observing that even the crucifixion of the Master had not dispersed the disciples, resolved to silence the men who were now speaking in His name. The Sadducees, who denied the doctrine of a resurrection, associated with the priests and the captain of the temple in order that

they might lay hands on Peter and John; and after casting them into prison for a night, brought them forth to examine them regarding their preaching and the miracle of the healing of the lame man. Thousands had heard and believed that preaching, and the man who had been lame could be seen standing with the apostles. The Sadducees and the priests were in perplexity. In their fear of the people they could discover no just cause for the punishment of the two apostles. They determined, therefore, simply to charge Peter and John to abstain from speaking in the name of Jesus, but they did not see that it was impossible to silence men having a divine command to preach the Gospel. This, the first contest between the representatives of the newly-constituted Church and the leaders of the Jews, was not yet a conflict unto the death of victims.

In spite of the Jewish authorities, the preaching continued with power and effect; and again the anger of leaders in Israel was roused. Peter and other apostles, released by a miracle from prison, were subjected to examination. They had received the command that they were not to speak; but now by the mouth of Peter they professed that they had chosen to obey God rather than man, and they declared the exaltation of Jesus who had been slain. The testimony of these men, who carried themselves as those who feared nothing, kindled afresh the wrath of their enemies; they stood, indeed, in danger of death, till Gamaliel, notable among the Pharisees,

advised that the apostles should be left alone. He argued that their counsel, if the work of man, would come to nought; and, if the work of God, could not be overthrown. The advice was accepted, save that the apostles were beaten, and once more they were commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus. Not yet was a follower of the Crucified appointed to lay down his life for his faith, though the advance of the Gospel through the toil and bravery of its preachers had disturbed the representatives of the old religion, who, zealous indeed for the endurance of that truth which was their spiritual heritage, were blind to the new light which had come into the world.

The first martyr to die for the cause of Christ was Stephen, who had been appointed one of seven men to serve tables. Frequenters of a well-known synagogue who could not resist the wisdom of his words hired false witnesses to bear testimony against him. These witnesses maintained that Stephen had declared that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the temple, and would change the customs delivered by Moses. The accused was led before the Jewish council and was permitted to plead in his own case. In the speech which he made he traced the history of Israel, showing how the people resisted Moses, and how Solomon built a temple, though the Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; and declared that his hearers resisted the Holy Ghost, as had their fathers. With no fear of the consequences he boldly asserted that they had been the betrayers

and murderers of the Just One, and had even failed to keep the law which they had received by the disposition of angels. These hearers were lashed into fury; and while danger threatened Stephen at their hands, he beheld the vision of the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. "Behold," he said, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God"; and hearing his words his enemies cast him out of the city. Then they stoned him as he called upon God, and cried to the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit. As with the mind of the Lord Jesus the martyr prayed that the sin should not be laid to their charge, and when he had thus prayed he "fell asleep." The Pharisees constituted themselves the special guardians of the law of Moses and the advocates of the divine majesty of the temple, and it was they whom Stephen addressed and they chiefly who compassed his death. Sadducees and Pharisees alike had now used violence to crush the infant Church of Christ.

The witnesses against Stephen, when the martyr was stoned, left their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul, who afterwards made havoc of the Church in Jerusalem, committing men and women to prison. The apostles remained in the city; but many members of the Church were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, and these, strengthened by the sacred memory of the martyr, extended the sphere of the Christian mission, so that the Gospel was heard beyond the confines of Jerusalem.

The outstanding event in the early years of the Church was the conversion of Saul, who, on the road to Damascus, while engaged on an errand of persecution, heard the words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" The Apostle of the Gentiles, when in his missionary journeys he entered the synagogues of the Jews, came into conflict with men who resented the preaching of the Gospel by one who had been a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea and Jerusalem witnessed the conflict.

For some years after the death of Stephen and the conversion of Paul the Church at Jerusalem enjoyed peace, which was at last ruthlessly broken by Herod Agrippa, a grandson of Herod the Great. This Herod, by the favour of the Roman Emperor Claudius, added Samaria and Judea to his kingdom; and though his reputation had been vile in Rome, he stood high in estimation in Jerusalem on account of his scrupulous regard for the observances of the Jewish religion. Without legal trial, but simply at the royal command, probably in the year 44, James, the brother of John, was beheaded; and the king, seeing how this execution pleased the Jews, proceeded to lay hold of Peter, and cast him into prison. Peter, by miraculous help, escaped from the prison and from the hands of the royal persecutor, whose death was soon to end his projects to vex the Church. Eusebius, the celebrated Church historian of the fourth century, relates the tradition that the man who led James to the judg-

ment-seat, witnessing the apostle's testimony to the Faith, was moved in his soul, and confessed himself a Christian. The two men were led forth to die, and on their way to death he asked James to forgive him, who replied, "Peace be to thee," and kissed him.

Another conspicuous name was to be added to the roll of martyrs who suffered at Jerusalem in the conflict with the Jews. The High Priest, Annas the younger, brought James, the head of the Christian community in Jerusalem, and certain others before the Jewish Council, where they were condemned to death as violators of the law of Moses. Festus, the Roman Procurator, died in the year 61 or 62, and before his successor Albinus arrived in Judea, Annas, exercising the ancient power of the Council, as if no Roman authority controlled the Jews, sentenced James to be stoned to death. According to a doubtful passage in the Jewish historian Josephus, James was the "brother of Jesus," who was called Christ; and according to a fragment of the historian Hegesippus, preserved by Eusebius, he was styled the Just. It may be that Annas wished simply to strike a blow at the Church in Jerusalem, by crushing its chief representative; or it may be that James, preaching Christ as the Messiah, and prophesying His second advent, roused the anger of the High Priest, who, with his party of the Sadducees dreaded a political or religious revolution, associated with the name of a Messiah, which might injure their social supremacy in Palestine. In any case, the leader of the Jews con-

demned to death the head of the Christian community and James was stoned. Hegesippus has given a strange description of this man, which, however, cannot be verified. It shows none the less the fantastic picture of a pious Christian which was formed by early Jewish-Christian tradition. Hegesippus, who probably flourished about the middle of the second century, wrote: "But James, the brother of the Lord, who, as there were many of his name, was surnamed the Just by all, from the days of our Lord until now, received the government of the Church with the apostles. This apostle was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank neither wine nor fermented liquors, and abstained from animal food. A razor never came upon his head, he never anointed with oil, and never used a bath. He alone was allowed to enter the sanctuary. He never wore woollen, but linen garments. He was in the habit of entering the temple alone, and was often found upon his bended knees, and interceding for the forgiveness of the people; so that his knees became as hard as camels', in consequence of his habitual supplication and kneeling before God. And, indeed, on account of his exceeding great piety, he was called the Just." James, according to the tradition, was cast down from a wing of the temple, and not dying immediately was stoned, and even then prayed for forgiveness for his destroyers. At last a fuller beat out the brains of the Apostle with a club.

The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in

the year 70 practically closed the history of the Jewish State; but before that event the Christian community had removed for safety to Pella, where the tradition, though not the glory, of the Christian Church of Jerusalem was maintained. Pella, an unimportant city beyond the Jordan, had not witnessed the crucifixion of the Lord, nor received the blood of the martyrs; and when, therefore, Jerusalem was destroyed, though its site was for ever sacred as the scene of the death of Jesus, the faithful began to turn their eyes to Rome, where new events and fresh tragedies were consecrating the imperial city as the centre of the Christian Church.

Sulpicius Severus, a writer of the latter part of the fourth century, who probably made use of books of Tacitus which have been lost to us, narrates that after the capture of Jerusalem, a council of war discussed the question of the destruction of the temple, and that Titus advised its ruin in order that the Jewish and Christian religions might be extirpated. This statement, if true, shows that the old and the new religions were in the year 70 distinguished one from the other in the sight of the Roman conquerors of Jerusalem. Conflict in the city of the Jews had made plain the separation of the two Faiths, and had helped to give cohesion and strength to the early Church in Judea. Already, however, in Rome, before the date of the fall of Jerusalem, persecution had directed itself against the Christians. Persecution, which for almost three centuries was to indicate from time to

time with tragic emphasis the relation of the Roman State to the Christian Church, helped to make the Church conscious and mindful of its unity as the Christian society, to give it vigour for self-preservation, and to mark it with the glory of suffering for a holy cause.

Christianity, when it passed beyond Palestine, established itself in such places as Antioch, Ephesus and Corinth, from which it further spread among Jews and Gentiles of other localities. When it advanced to the city of Rome it reached the centre of the empire, a fitting place for the establishment of the universal religion. The nations which formed the civilised world were combined under one imperial government; peace was widely enjoyed in the empire in the first era of the Christian Church, and there was ample religious liberty. In spite of its small beginnings in Palestine, Christianity was ultimately to become the recognised religion of the Roman empire; and a notable advance was made when it established itself in the imperial city. At first, indeed, it was not viewed as separate from Judaism, and so it shared the privileges of Judaism as a *religio licita*, a recognised and legalised religion in the State.

In the year 63 B.C., Pompey, the Roman general, sacked Jerusalem, and after putting thousands of the Jews to death, he carried back others with him to swell his triumph on the streets of Rome. "Amongst the train," to use Dean Stanley's words, "of the inferior captives who were thus left after the triumph,

and who, on recovering their liberty, had either not the means or the inclination to return to their distant country, was the large band of Jewish exiles, to whom was assigned a district on the right bank of the Tiber. . . . By establishing this community Pompey was, although he knew it not, the founder of the Roman Church." This community flourished, and was in constant intercourse with the East, and word of the events happening in Jerusalem would be eagerly sought by Jews exiled from their beloved Zion. The report of the crucifixion would be received, of Him who claimed to be the Messiah, and was condemned to the death of a criminal. Of the men who first named the name of Christ in Rome nothing is known. A Roman historian has recorded that the Emperor Claudius, probably about the year 52 A.D., "expelled the Jews from Rome who, at the instigation of Chrestus, indulged frequently in riots." In the word Chrestus there is probably a reference to Christ, and, if so, it may be argued that in the year 52 there were Christians in Rome. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, however, it is stated that Aquila and Priscilla had gone to Corinth "because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome"; and this brief narrative, therefore, indicates that though there were certain followers of Christ in Rome, they were not at the date of this expulsion marked off from the Jews. The Epistle to the Romans, written perhaps in the year 57, though the exact date is uncertain, contains the words, "Paul a servant of Jesus Christ to

all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints," and bears witness to the fact that in the year of the composition of the Epistle there was a Christian community in the imperial city. Regarding that community, so far as its foundation and early progress are concerned, few historical facts have been preserved, but in the reign of the Emperor Nero tragic events made it conspicuous.

In the year 64 A.D., a fire broke out which destroyed a great part of the city. Men told in later days that the emperor stood on the top of a tower watching the flames, and that dressed as an actor, with a lyre in his hand, he sang the pathetic lament over the ruin of Troy. The citizens, who knew the character of Nero, judged him guilty of destroying the city out of sheer wantonness, or for his own private ends. Nero, however, being anxious to ward off suspicion from himself as the perpetrator of the crime, cast the blame upon the Christians, thinking that they were more hated than even he himself was by the people of Rome. In their adherence to their faith the followers of Christ brought upon themselves the suspicion of disloyalty to the imperial government. The Jews with their intense religious bigotry would harass them in every fashion, and cause them to be marked as disturbers of the peace; while they themselves would offend the Romans by refusing to sacrifice to the gods and to enter their temples. Their words, too, would seem to imply a menace to the State, when they spoke of the distress of nations and of the shaking of the powers of

heaven, perhaps, too, of a great final conflagration, and pointed to these as the signs of the coming of the Son of Man. Suspicion, therefore, was not difficult to create in the minds of the Roman citizens; and Nero, with the cunning of a master of deception, threw the blame of the Roman fire upon the Christians. No legal trial gave them an opportunity of proving their innocence in regard to the charge of incendiarism. They were indeed tried, after being accused of committing crimes of which we hardly know the character. It is not impossible that they were charged with using magical or supernatural means to attract converts to their faith. So far as the fire was concerned, the truth seems to be that they were punished in order to satisfy the pretended justice of an emperor and to appease the fury of an enraged people. Men and women were dressed in the skins of wild beasts and thrown to the dogs, who tore them to death. Men were crucified, and yet others were clad in garments steeped in oil or pitch, and then tied to posts, in order that when the darkness fell they might be kindled as torches to illuminate the imperial gardens. And Nero, not improbably on this occasion, as he had done before, drove his chariot along the avenues lighted by the flames of burning men and women.

The Christians were innocent, and yet writers recorded the satisfaction of the Roman citizens that so many enemies of the State, given over to mischievous superstitions, had been swept away. From the words of Tacitus, the Roman historian, it seems that many

victims perished, but it is impossible to fix even an approximate number. The fate of these victims, martyrs for their religion, stirred the deepest feelings of the Christian community throughout all its scattered members, and the Book of Revelation is a lasting witness of the intense excitement created in at least one section of the Church by the savage cruelties directed by the ruler of the empire. And the permanent effect of the massacre at Rome, which was more indeed than the mere wonder of a day, may be expressed in the graphic words of M. Renan :—

"The orgy of Nero was the great baptism of blood which marked out Rome, as the city of martyrs, to play a special part in the history of Christianity, and to become its second holy place. It was the taking possession of the Vatican Hill by a triumphant army of a kind which the world had not yet known. The hateful madman who governed the world did not perceive that he was the founder of a new order of things."

Apart from the difficulty of fixing the number of the victims, there is the further difficulty of determining the duration of the persecution. It seems certain, however, that when the charge of setting the city on fire ceased to be preferred, trials continued at which the Christians were condemned for their hatred of society. Adhesion to their faith prevented them from engaging in some of the customs of Roman society, and many things which they did were interpreted as crimes against the existing civilization. When brought

to trial they made confession, not certainly of crimes, but of their faith, and were condemned for harbouring hatred of the Roman society, and therefore of being enemies to the State. The accusations seem to have been frequent in the period between the burning of the city and the flight of Nero from Rome in 68 ; and though these accusations became fewer when Nero ceased to exercise his cruelty, and when his immediate successors were not alarmed for the safety of the Empire, the attitude of the State continued hostile to the Church.

In the traditions of the Church the most noted of the Roman martyrs were the apostles Peter and Paul. While there can be no doubt that St Paul was for a time a prisoner in Rome, whatever the manner of his death may have been, there is grave uncertainty regarding the tradition that St Peter was in Rome, and that he died in the city.

In the Acts of the Apostles it is recorded that "Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house" ; and though it be admitted that he was released after a first trial, left the city, and again returned, we are still without knowledge of the time and manner of his death. It may be, indeed, that he was executed as the result of his appeal to Cæsar, that he perished among the crowd of martyrs in the first days of the Neronian persecution, or that he suffered death, perhaps, in the years 66 or 67, when the excitement over the burning of the city had ceased, and men were condemned for confessing the name of Christ. The

general belief, however, in the early Church was that St Paul perished in Rome; and tradition, with no historic basis now known to us, made Rome the scene of St Peter's crucifixion. In the Gospel of St John it is told that Jesus said to Peter: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shalt gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." The writer of the Gospel adds: "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." There can be no doubt, from these words, that St Peter died as a martyr, and almost certainly was crucified; but there is no indication in the New Testament that the imperial city was the scene of the martyrdom. In the literature outside the New Testament the earliest reference to the apostle's death is found in an epistle, probably written towards the close of the first century, by Clement, an overseer of the Church in Rome. Clement wrote: "Peter, through unrighteous envy, endured not one or two, but numerous labours, and when he had at length suffered martyrdom, departed to the place of glory due to him." The assertion, however, is not that Peter died at Rome, but simply that he suffered martyrdom.

Legend has not failed to deal with the names of the apostles. The story was told that a God-fearing woman, Perpetua by name, wept bitterly on seeing Paul led to execution. She bestowed her handkerchief on the apostle, praying the soldiers to bind his

eyes with it. When she received it back there were drops of blood on it, and as she carried it she regained her sight which had been lost in one of her eyes. On the road to his martyrdom, it was also told, St Paul converted three soldiers. Of the death of St Peter there are fanciful but touching legends. In one of these he was represented as saying: "A few days ago, being exhorted by the brethren, I was going away, and my Lord Jesus Christ met me, and, having adored Him, I said, 'Lord, whither art Thou going?' And He said to me, 'I am going to Rome to be crucified.' And I said to Him, 'Lord, wast Thou not crucified once for all?' And the Lord answering said, 'I saw thee fleeing from death, and I wish to be crucified instead of thee.' And I said, 'Lord, I go, I fulfil Thy command.' And He said, 'Fear not, for I am with thee.'"

Peter, it is further told, returned to the city to imprisonment. In prison he converted two of the jailers and others, causing a spring to burst out of the floor, that there might be water for baptism. His wife, whom he saw being led forth to execution, he addressed with the words, "Oh, remember the Lord"; and he rejoiced at her "journey homewards."

Peter and Paul, according to legend, were executed on the same day. They parted on the Ostian road. Paul, being a Roman citizen, was led outside the city to be beheaded. Peter was taken to one of the hills within the city and crucified, head downwards. When he came to the cross he said: "Since my Lord Jesus

Christ, who came down from the heaven upon the earth, was raised upon the cross upright, and He has designed to call to heaven me who am of the earth, my cross ought to be fixed head downmost, so as to direct my feet toward heaven; for I am not worthy to be crucified like my Lord."

The glory of martyrdom in Rome was not awarded by tradition to any of the apostles save Peter and Paul; though others, it was declared, died for their faith. When Christianity had established itself in the world, various churches satisfied their pride by circulating stories regarding their apostolic origin; and these stories did not seem to violate history, as it was generally believed that the apostles had gone forth by lot among the nations. To quote the words of Dean Milman, "Thrace, Scythia, Spain, Britain, Ethiopia, the extreme parts of Africa, India, the name of which mysterious region was sometimes assigned to the southern coast of Arabia, had each its apostle, whose spiritual triumphs and cruel martyrdom were vividly pourtrayed and gradually amplified by the fertile invention of the early Church." Andrew, one of the twelve, it was said, went to Scythia, and was martyred at Patræ on a decussate cross. Matthew, some said, preached in Ethiopia where he suffered martyrdom; and Bartholomew laboured in India, and was flayed or crucified in Armenia. John, of whom, as we are told in the Gospel narrative, the saying went abroad that he should not die, was the last of the disciples to taste of death. Though he did not perish

as a martyr, legend surrounded his name with many wonderful stories. The Emperor Domitian, so runs one story, caused him to be thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, and when he was not harmed, ordered him to be banished to Patmos.

Questions.

I. How did the Sadducees and Pharisees act towards the apostles?

II. Who were the martyrs in Jerusalem? What do we know from the New Testament regarding them?

III. How did Jerusalem cease and Rome come to be the centre of the Christian Church?

IV. What were the circumstances of the Neronian persecution?

V. What are the traditions regarding the death of St Peter and St Paul?

VI. What was the fate of St John, and what traditions have been preserved regarding the martyrdom of other disciples?

CHAPTER II

Nero died in the year 68 A.D., and, as may be gathered from the Book of Revelation, there was the belief in certain places that he was not really dead, and that he would again appear in Rome to begin the reign of anti-Christ which was to precede the second advent of the Messiah. King Arthur, in British legend, was to come again to right wrongs and establish justice. The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, of the Holy Roman Empire, was in popular fancy to return to lead

his beloved knights and soldiers. Affection inspired the desire for the re-appearing of these two heroes, but terror created the dread that Nero would again establish himself in Rome. Though in the Christian imagination he was too wicked to live and too evil to die, he of course did not return to Rome, and during the years which followed his death the Christian Church gained in strength.

Orosius, a Spanish divine, who, at the suggestion of St Augustine, wrote a history of the world, states that the persecution extended to the provinces. There is no proof in this statement, however, that there was any widespread persecution during Nero's reign, though beyond the city there may have been individual cases of martyrdom. The persecution none the less affected the whole Church. Christian men and women learned that sufferiug must be their lot, and the records show how many were true to their profession of faith. They did not accept terms which would give them peace, and leave them unmolested by noisy patriots professing zeal for the stability of the empire, or by religious fanatics eager to crush opponents of their own faith. On the contrary, as they increased in numbers, they became more and more marked off from the citizens of the Empire, through their attachment to their own ceremonies of worship and their neglect of Roman religious rites. Their increasing numbers, their better organization, and, above all, their growing enthusiasm for their sacred cause, did not increase their popularity in any of the

regions of the empire, yet in the first century, at any rate, they were not sufficiently numerous to constitute a real menace to the prosperity of imperial Rome. At any time the cruelty of an emperor, or his superstition for the worship of the gods, might lead to a persecution of the Christians; but so long as they themselves did not directly or indirectly provoke to political or religious disorder, they were left undisturbed. After the death of Nero, throughout the reigns of Vespasian and Titus, from the year 68 till the accession of Domitian in the year 81, there was no general persecution. There is no reason, however, to believe that these emperors were in any way friendly towards the new religion. On the contrary, if the words of Titus are to be believed regarding the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem as the sacred place of Judaism and Christianity, the policy of Vespasian and his son Titus was certainly not favourable to the Church. The hostile attitude of the State was plainly seen in the reign of Domitian, who was the instigator of what has been known as the second persecution of the Christians. In *Revelation* there is a passage which indicates that the early Christians had the idea that a series of ten disasters was to afflict the Church. That passage, containing the words "the ten horns . . . are ten kings . . . these shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them," led certain historians to describe the persecutions as ten in number, and of these the second was that carried out by Domitian.

In the earlier part of his reign Domitian acted with dignity and justice not unworthy of his great position, but year after year he degenerated in character, and his rule was marked by tyranny, cruelty and blood. He revelled in adding to the magnificent buildings of the city, and in glutting the eyes of the people with shows of barbaric splendour, so that the imperial treasury was emptied. Money he must have, and among his plans was the seizure of the temple tax which the Jews had been wont to pay. The temple no longer stood as the national symbol of the religion of Israel, and the tax therefore was not strictly valid. It had been assigned, however, to Jupiter Capitolinus, and Domitian determined to secure it and to levy it from Jews and from those, including Christians, who followed such Jewish manners as the abstention from meats offered to idols. Many of these Christians were not Jewish by birth, and would not have themselves confounded with the Jews through this tax. They would not pay, and again, as in the days of Nero, Christians were specially marked as enemies of the Roman State. Domitian was not the man to tolerate a refusal of taxation, even though Christian feelings were outraged, and thus the followers of Christ were accounted guilty of disloyalty. While we know little of the men who suffered outside the imperial city, and know few even of the names of those who perished in Rome, we have probably in 1st Peter and Revelation proofs of the existence of a widespread and violent persecution. The writer of *1st Peter* advises those to

whom the Epistle is addressed to be steadfast, "knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world"; while in *Revelation* there are many passages pointing to persecution. "I saw," says the seer, "under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given out unto them every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." Again the seer says: "And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." While the faithfulness of certain Churches is recognised, and the extent of the tribulation is made manifest, there is only one person, Antipas, named; and of him we know nothing, save that he was slain among the martyrs of the Church of Pergamos.

In Rome itself the most noted of those who suffered under Domitian were the consul Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domitilla, his wife, or niece, as one account has

it. Clemens was put to death, and Domitilla banished, on the charge, according to the historian Dion Cassius, of atheism and inclination to Jewish customs. There is no certainty that these two were Christians, though the presumption is in favour of the tradition preserved in the Church, that they suffered for their adherence to the Christian faith. The presumption is strengthened by the discovery in recent times of the burying-place of Domitilla, situated near the tombs of certain Roman bishops, which shows marks of having been the possession of a Christian. Clemens and Domitilla were members of the family to which Domitian belonged, and he spared them not in that passion which punished the wisest and best of his court. The religion of Christ, if for professing it these two were made to suffer, had not, it is evident, kept itself to the poor and outcast among the Jews, and to slaves among the Gentiles, but had penetrated into the household of Cæsar. And the words of the Apocalypse, "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded," may be specially noted, since they show that among the victims were men of superior social rank, for whom the punishment of beheadal was retained.

Domitian acted with the wanton cruelty of an irresponsible madman, banishing the wisest men from Rome, destroying such as Clement whom he wished out of his path, and persecuting Jews and Christians whom, with the zeal of a fanatic, he wished to compel to the worship of the gods. A tyrant as he was, he

feared, after the manner of his kind, that the oppressed might plot against his political power and the persecuted against his personal safety, and he therefore sent forth emissaries to discover revolutionaries and plotters, and surrounded himself with spies to watch his enemies. Eusebius tells a story, obtained from the writings of the earlier historian Hegesippus, which if not true is at least graphic and interesting. Domitian, it is said, ordered that all the descendants of David should be slain. "There were yet living," Hegesippus related, "of the family of our Lord, the grandchildren of Judas, called the brother of our Lord, according to the flesh. These were reported as being of the family of David, and were brought to Domitian by the Evocatus. For this emperor was as much alarmed at the appearance of Christ as Herod. He put the question whether they were of David's race, and they confessed that they were. He then asked them what property they had, or how much money they owned. And both of them answered that they had between them only nine thousand denarii, and this they had not in silver, but in the value of a piece of land containing only thirty-nine acres, from which they raised their taxes and supported themselves by their own labour. Then they also began to show their hands, exhibiting the hardness of their bodies, and the callosity formed by incessant labour on their hands, as evidence of their own labour. When asked, also, respecting Christ and His kingdom, what was its nature, and when and where it was to appear, they replied 'that it was not a

temporal nor an earthly kingdom, but celestial and angelic; that it would appear at the end of the world, when coming in glory He would judge the quick and dead, and give to everyone according to his works.' Upon which Domitian, despising them, made no reply; but treating them with contempt, as simpletons, commanded them to be dismissed, and by a decree ordered the persecution to cease."

Hegesippus, in the passage quoted, says that Domitian ordered the persecution to cease, but other authorities declared that it continued till his death, which took place in the year 96. Domitian was murdered; and the chief actor in the tragedy by which the world got rid of the hated emperor was Stephanus, a freedman, who had been of the household of Domitilla. Some of the soldiers whom Domitian had favoured wished him to be honoured as divine after his death, but wiser counsels prevailed, and the man who himself had desired in his lifetime to be regarded as a god, died unmourned by his own household, and unreverenced throughout the empire.

With the death of Domitian and the accession of Nerva there began a period, extending to the death of Marcus Aurelius (180 A.D.), of peace, prosperity and progress, which has been styled the golden age of the Roman Empire. Throughout this period Christianity progressed, and though the State did not change its attitude of hostility, and many men, and some of them illustrious, were martyred for their faith, the Church

none the less increased throughout its organisation, and continued the work of converting the empire.

Nerva was an old man when he received the imperial crown, and his reign was short. He was little fitted to be the head of a military empire; and was not the man to endear himself to the army, which played so large a part in Roman politics. Fortunately for the empire on the one hand and the Church on the other, Nerva was inclined to peace, and represented a reaction against the tyranny of Domitian. The men who had been banished from the imperial city were recalled, and with toleration, which was questioned in its day, Nerva did nothing against the sycophants who had been the tools of his predecessor. Jews and Christians alike had reason to praise the old man who sat on Cæsar's chair, since he would not condescend to religious persecution. Before he had reigned two years, however, he saw that the military affairs of the State required a strong and active man, and passing over his own relations he adopted as his son, that he might be his successor, the distinguished soldier Marcus Ulpius Trajanus, known to us as the Emperor Trajan. The historian of Rome has to tell of the greatness of Trajan's reign, not simply through the success of his arms, but through his care of the poor, his activity in improving the condition of the city, and his concern for the political welfare of every part of the empire. One of the sculptors of the city represented him as setting out for the wars, and having a woman kneeling at his feet. From this representation

the story grew and was believed, that a poor widow went to Trajan, asking for the punishment of a soldier who had killed her son. The emperor said to her, "When I come back I will listen to your suit." "And who," replied the woman, "will right me if you die?" "My successor," answered Trajan. Then the woman proceeded: "Your successor; yes, but his act will not profit you, and it were better, surely, to do the good yourself and to deserve the recompense that will follow." The emperor was touched by the widow's words, heard her complaint and saw that justice was done. Another story was afterwards told, that Pope Gregory the Great prayed for the soul of the man who had done justice to the widow, and that the emperor was ultimately saved. Dante has introduced this story into his *Purgatory*, and in his *Paradise* has represented Trajan as one of five pagans who have reached heaven.

In the year 112, in the reign of Trajan, Pliny the Younger, proprætor of Bithynia, addressed a letter to the emperor which is of the greatest interest, as throwing light on the condition and treatment of Christians in that year. Christianity, it appears, had spread throughout the cities and villages of Bithynia, and the temples of the old religion were neglected. In consequence of this neglect, those whose business depended on the sacrifices to pagan deities suffered financial loss, and probably, though there is no definite information, lodged complaints against the Christians. Pliny was forced, as a magistrate, to consider the com-

plaints, and in the course of the proceedings found it necessary to consult the emperor. The letter is as follows:—

It is my custom, lord Emperor, to refer to you all questions whereof I am in doubt. . . . In investigations of Christians I have never taken part. . . . So I have no little uncertainty whether there is any distinction of age, or whether the very weakest offenders are treated exactly like the stronger; whether pardon is given to those who repent, or whether nobody who has ever been a Christian at all, gains anything by having ceased to be such; whether punishment attaches to the mere name apart from secret crimes, or to the secret crimes connected with the name. Meantime this is the course I have taken with those who were accused before me as Christians. I asked at their own lips whether they were Christians, and if they confessed, I asked them a second and a third time with threats of punishment. If they kept to it I ordered them for execution; for I held no question that whatever it was that they admitted, in any case obstinacy and unbending perversity deserve to be punished. There were others of the like insanity; but as they were Roman citizens, I noted them down to be sent to Rome. . . . An unsigned paper gave the names of many. As for those who said they neither were nor ever had been Christians, I thought it right to let them go, since they raised a prayer to the gods at my dictation, made supplication with wine and incense to your statue . . . and moreover

cursed Christ—not one of which things (so it is said) those who are really Christians can be made to do. Others who were named by the informer said that they were Christians and then denied it, explaining that they had been, but had ceased to be such, some three years ago, some a good many years, and one as many as twenty. . . . They maintain, however, that their fault or error was this, that it was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as a God; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done, their custom was to depart, and meet together again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food; and even this (they said) they had given up doing after the issue of my edict, by which in accordance with your commands I had forbidden the existence of clubs. On this I considered it the more necessary to find out from two maid-servants who were called deaconesses, and that by torments, how far this was true; but I discovered nothing else than a wicked and arrogant superstition. I therefore adjourned the case and hastened to consult you. The matter seemed to me worth deliberation, especially on account of the number of those in danger; for many of all ages and every rank, and even of both sexes, are brought into present or future danger. The contagion of superstition has penetrated not the cities only, but the villages and country; yet it seems

possible to stop it and set it right. At any rate it is certain enough that the almost deserted temples begin to be resorted to, that long disused ceremonies of religion are restored, and that fodder for victims finds a market, whereas buyers till now were very few. From this it may easily be supposed what a multitude of men can be reclaimed, if there be a place of repentance." (Translation from "Selections from Early Christian Writers," H. M. Gwatkin.)

The region which Pliny governed had been the scene of apostolic labours, and probably in no other district was Christianity more strongly organised; but till his administration, as is evident from his letter, there had been no judicial proceedings against the Christians. Disorder, however, was not to be tolerated by a zealous official like Pliny, who found that the representatives of the new religion refused to take part in the pagan rites and ceremonies, and thereby caused disturbance. Trials took place, and those who persisted in their faith were put to death. The accused who offered incense before the statue of the emperor, as the symbol or representative of the imperial religion, and cursed Christ, were not sentenced to death; but the question of their punishment arose. Were they to be set free; or were they, as guilty of crimes, to be punished, and in what way? In regard to this question Pliny desired to consult the emperor; and, probably, in order to know the crimes which a profession of the Christian name implied, made inquiry concerning the conduct of the Christians. As a result

of the investigation he concluded that they were not guilty of such crimes as child-murder and cannibalism, with which they were popularly charged, but simply of a degraded and irrational superstition which, if maintained, deserved the punishment of death. Trajan's rescript or official answer is worthy of note, as showing the character of the man, and indicating the attitude of the Roman State to the Christian Church. The emperor wrote: "You have followed, my Secundus, the process you should have done in examining the cases of those who were accused to you as Christians, for indeed nothing can be laid down as a general law involving something like a definite rule of action. They are not to be sought out, but if they are accused and convicted, they must be punished; yet on this condition, that whoso denies himself to be a Christian, and makes the fact plain by his action, that is, by worshipping our gods, shall obtain pardon on his repentance, however suspicious his past conduct may have been. Papers, however, which are presented unsigned ought not to be admitted in any charge, for they are a very bad example, and unworthy of our time."

Trajan, bearing the burden of an empire, and conscious of the responsibility of government, desired that good order should be maintained in the provinces, and consequently approved the action of Pliny in proceeding against those who persisted in their Christian faith. Those who admitted the name of Christian were to be put to death, but the emperor,

with true Roman dignity, would not have the magistrate seek out the Christians for persecution, and would not have him accept anonymous accusations against them. Yet when all is said in praise of Trajan, the fact still remains that he represented the antagonism of the Roman State to the Church; and that throughout his reign, as in many years which followed, any who confessed the name of Christian subjected themselves to the risk of the punishment of death.

The historians who number the persecutions of the Church have assigned the third to the reign of Trajan; and though there is proof in Pliny's letter that many Christians suffered in that emperor's time, we hardly know the name of one of them. Probably there were martyrdoms in other places besides the region of Bithynia, as tradition tells of two brothers, Nereus and Achilleus, to whose memory a church was dedicated in Rome. A book was published in the fifth or sixth century, "The Acts of the Holy Nereus and Achilleus," which related that these martyrs, who were of the household of Flavia Domitilla, were slain at Terracina, and that their bodies were removed to a catacomb near Rome. It is not clear in what year they perished, but it is stated in these Acts, though there is no other authority, that Domitilla herself was martyred in the reign of Trajan.

Hegesippus, as quoted by Eusebius, narrates the circumstances attending the death of Simeon, whom he styles the son of Cleophas. James the Just was followed by Simeon in the rule of the Church at

Jerusalem; and he too, perhaps the cousin of Jesus according to the flesh, was added to the number of the martyrs. It is narrated that "some reported Simeon, the son of Cleophas, as a descendant of David and a Christian; and thus he suffered as a martyr when he was an hundred and twenty years old." It is further told that "after he was tormented many days, he died a martyr with such firmness that all were amazed, even the president himself, that a man of an hundred and twenty years should bear such tortures. He was at last ordered to be crucified." There is no reason to deny the fact that Simeon perished, as Hegesippus relates, though the age of the venerable martyr may be doubted. He may not indeed have been the son of Cleophas named in the New Testament, but still may have been related to Christ; and there is every reason to believe that in him there died, for his Master's sake, one of the kinsmen of the Lord.

The Christian records of the early part of the second century are few, and our information regarding the period is therefore meagre. One of the most famous men of that time was Ignatius, bishop of Antioch; and yet, distinguished though he was as an administrator in the Church, as a writer, and as a martyr, it is impossible to determine the year of his death. Certain historians hold that he perished during the reign of Trajan, probably in the period from 112 to 117; while others point to the reign of Hadrian or that of Antoninus Pius, assigning the martyrdom to the period extending from 130 to 140. The date

and genuineness of the writings of Ignatius have important bearings on the question of the growth of episcopacy, but the circumstances of his death are not associated with that question, and his martyrdom may therefore be described as if it occurred in Trajan's reign.

Nothing is known regarding the seizure of Ignatius at Antioch, but his eminence in the Church would subject him to the hatred and attack of the pagan population, and it is certain that he was condemned to death and ordered to be sent to Rome to be torn by the beasts in the Colosseum.

The journey to Rome was a long one, but as he passed through the places where Christianity had found a home, he was honoured as a victor rather than as a captive, and was consulted as a prophet with a message from God. Epistles to various Churches were written by him, and some of these have been preserved. Ignatius gloried in the prospect of death, and what he wrote created in the Church a passion for martyrdom, so that many lived hoping to die for Christ's cause. "I inform all," he wrote, "that I am assured of dying for God, if you do not prevent me. I beg you not to prove yourselves by your intemperate goodness my worst enemies. Let me be the food of beasts, thanks to whom it shall be given me to enjoy God; I am the wheat of God, I must be ground by the teeth of beasts that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. . . . I shall gain, I assure you, when I find myself face to face with the beasts which await

me. I hope to meet them in good temper; if needs be, I will caress them with my hands, that they may devour me alone, and that they may not, as they have done to some, show themselves afraid to touch me. . . . It is now that I begin to be a true disciple. No! no power, visible or invisible, shall prevent me from rejoicing in Jesus Christ. Fire and cross; troops of beasts; broken bones; limbs lopped off; crushing of the whole body; all the punishments of the devil, may fall upon me, if only I may rejoice in Jesus Christ." The pious passion which inspired the words of Ignatius, his march to Rome as if a triumph, and the enthusiasm of the Christians for their venerated brother, suggested the plan of a work, "Of the death of Peregrinus," to the satirist Lucian. Lucian's hero is a charlatan who becomes a bishop, and who has to march to Rome, amidst the plaudits of his admirers, to appear before the emperor, whom he defies. The satire doubtless stimulated pagan disgust against the enthusiasm for martyrdom which Ignatius inspired. We are left to imagine the death of Ignatius in the Colosseum. History has preserved no details, but legend has told how he appeared in the arena and testified by his words to his faith in Christ. A vast multitude watched him, as if he were but an actor on the stage. Lions were let loose, and, as the legend says, "his prayer was heard, the lions left nothing but the harder bones of his body." Ignatius undoubtedly added by his death to the tragic scenes of a Roman holiday, and to the noble army of the martyrs. It is merely legend,

but it was for a long time accepted, that Ignatius was the little child whom Christ placed in the midst of the disciples, when He said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Questions.

I. What was the fate of Clemens and of Flavia Domitilla?
II. What is the story of the grand-children of Judas, called the brother of our Lord?
III. What was the attitude towards the Christians of Domitian and of Nerva?
IV. What were the contents of Pliny's letter to Trajan?
V. What was the character of the emperor's reply?
VI. What were the main events connected with the martyrdom of Ignatius?

CHAPTER III

The attitude of the Roman State to the Church in the second century was one of hostility, as the rescript of Trajan shows, but the hostility was not a fierce and unwearied persecution. On the contrary, when Hadrian succeeded Trajan, it almost seemed as if the Christians had found a friend. Hadrian, amidst the military and political concerns of a great empire, took time to inquire into the teaching of philosophers, and also into the creeds and religious mysteries of the various peoples whom he ruled; and, zealous for the welfare of the empire, and therefore for the preservation of

the ancient forms of religion as supports of the State, he none the less saw the spiritual worthlessness of that religion, and would not oppress its opponents. Christianity was growing stronger every year, and though it in no way imperilled the stability of the State, its supporters could be attacked in any place and at any time, as if their strength meant danger to the empire. The Christians yielded nothing in the way of compromise; they would not perform the rites of the Roman State religion, and their enemies could therefore pronounce them disloyal. Very often the magistrates were perplexed by the charges against men who were really in the main law-abiding, and there is evidence that more than one of them wrote to Hadrian in their difficulties. One of these magistrates drew from the emperor a rescript which has been preserved. The genuineness of that rescript has often been doubted, but when account is taken of the character of the emperor and the habits of the Christians, it is not possible to cast it aside as a forgery. Serenius Granianus, pro-consul of Asia, wrote "that it appeared to him unjust that the Christians should be put to death, only to gratify the clamours of the people, without trial, and without any crime proved against them." His successor, Minucius Fundanus, received the following words in reply: "I have received the letter addressed to me by your predecessor, Serenius Granianus, and this communication I am unwilling to pass over in silence, lest innocent persons be disturbed, and occasion be given

to the informers for practising villany. Accordingly, if the inhabitants of your province will so far sustain this petition of theirs as to accuse the Christians in some court of law, I do not prohibit them from doing so. But I will not suffer them to make use of mere entreaties and outcries. For it is far more just if anyone desires to make an accusation, that you give judgment upon it. If, therefore, anyone makes the accusation and furnishes proof that the said man do anything contrary to the law, you shall adjudge punishments in proportion to the offences. And this, by Hercules, you shall give special heed to, that if any man shall, through mere calumny, bring an accusation against any of these persons, you shall award him more severe punishments in proportion to his wickedness." By this rescript the position of the Christians was improved. Under Trajan the confession of the name of Christian was a confession of guilt. In Hadrian's letter there was no mention of the name, and it seems as if informers were required to prefer definite charges of crime, and to prove them under penalty of severe punishment. Yet the admission of the name might in the courts of certain magistrates insure prosecution, since there was no word yet from the lips of an emperor legalising or authorising the practice of Christianity.

The rescript belonged to the early part of Hadrian's reign, but before its close his character was to change, and under his inspiration, or by his permission, as tradition has it, the persecution of the Christians

increased. Yet it is strange that the man to whose reign the fourth Christian persecution has been assigned, was he to whom Quadratus, the Christian apologist, addressed his writing in defence of his religious associates. Quadratus must have had some hope that the emperor would not despise the cry for justice, and would not condemn unheard the Christians whose life was the guarantee of the worth of their religion. It is not improbable, however, that certain martyrdoms did take place in Trajan's reign, since the imperial policy was not such as to prevent the Christians from being attacked, and freedom was left to local magistrates to deal with individual cases. Telesphorus, the head of the Church in Rome, was martyred, probably the first overseer or bishop of that Church to suffer death. Nothing more than the bare chronicle of his fate has been preserved, but for some reason legend has associated many fanciful stories around the names of Getulius and his wife Symphorosa, who with their seven sons perished in the reign of Hadrian. Getulius, a tribune, and a man therefore of some social position, was put to death, and shortly afterwards his wife was required to offer sacrifices to the gods. Hadrian was present at the trial when she was threatened with death for herself and her sons if she did not pay adoration to the gods. In face of all threats she was steadfast, and at last was thrown into the river Anio. The seven sons were no less true to their faith, and all perished and were buried in one grave. Faustinus, a presbyter, with his brother Jovita,

a deacon, preached in Brescia, and the worship of the gods was almost forsaken. The two Christians were taken before the emperor, who sentenced them to be carried to Rome that their death might furnish a spectacle for the crowd. Many other martyrdoms have been assigned to the time of Hadrian, and these have been described with wealth of miraculous details. It suited the Church, after freedom from persecution had been gained, to rejoice in the story of her own suffering; and legends were invented and associated with men and women whose names were remembered, when the true history of their fate was forgotten. The age of Hadrian was not the age of the Christian historians, and many of the martyrdoms, of which only a memory lingered, were conveniently classed together in a period, so as to make the fourth Christian persecution.

Antoninus Pius, the successor of Hadrian, ascended the imperial throne in the year 138. The martyrdom of the famous Polycarp, who in his youth, it was believed, had been in the company of the Apostle John, took place in his reign; but far from sympathising with the popular clamour against the ancient bishop and approving the manner of the condemnation, he wrote letters to different parts of his empire, in order to secure just trials for the Christians when they were accused. Antoninus Pius has often been styled a second Nerva. Renan, with characteristic exuberance of sentiment, says he was the most perfect sovereign that ever lived. Undoubtedly he was

a great and good man, careful of public duty, a patron of philosophy, through which he thought to inherit eternal life. He did not, however, directly countenance Christianity. Loving peace, he did not persecute; yet unless he became a Christian, he was bound in the interests of his empire to press heavily on the Christian Church. Conflict was inevitable; but it is not necessary to judge as harsh and intolerant the emperor who did not make the antagonism against the Christians to cease, but took care that it should not become mere persecution, and that they should not be subjected to popular fury.

To Eusebius we are indebted for the details of the martyrdom of Polycarp, which probably took place in the year 155. That historian has preserved a fragment of an ancient letter from the Church of Smyrna which, while referring to the fate of Polycarp, gives a general account of the sufferings undergone by certain Christians. "For," says the letter, "those standing around were struck with amazement at seeing them lacerated with scourges, to their very blood and arteries, so that now the flesh concealed in the very inmost parts of the body, and the bowels themselves were exposed to view. Then they were laid upon conch shells from the sea, and on sharp heads and points of spears on the ground, and after passing through every kind of punishment and torment, were at last thrown as food to wild beasts." One of these martyrs, Germanicus, so roused the people of Smyrna by his bravery that they cried "Let Polycarp be sought." Polycarp, as the bishop

of Smyrna, was well-known to the people, and they demanded him as a victim. The bishop's friends persuaded him to leave Smyrna for a time, and he sought refuge in a farm not far from the city. There his time was spent in prayer, and on one occasion a vision appeared to him. He beheld the pillow under his head consumed by flames, and the vision he interpreted as a sign of his approaching death by fire. Acting again on the advice of his friends he sought refuge in another place, where he was captured and from which he was taken back to the city. "But . . . when the hour came for him to go they placed him upon an ass, and conducted him to the city, it being a quiet Sabbath day. He was met by Herod, who was the irenarch, and his father Nicetes, who, taking him into their vehicle, persuaded him to take a seat with them, and said, 'For what harm is there in saying Lord Cæsar, and to sacrifice and thus save your life?' He, however, did not at first make any reply; but as they persevered, he said, 'I shall not do as you advise me.'" After this answer the old man was thrust down from the car and injured, but at last was led to the stadium. A voice from heaven saluted him saying, "Be strong, Polycarp, and contend manfully." In the stadium the magistrate required him to swear by the genius of Cæsar, and to revile Christ. "Eighty and six years," replied Polycarp, "have I served Him and He never did me wrong, and how can I now blaspheme my King that has saved me?" At last, after many questions and answers, the

magistrate bade a herald proclaim, "Polycarp confesses that he is a Christian." Wood and straw were collected by the crowd to form a pile, and the victim was tied to a stake. "He, closing his hands behind him, and bound to the stake as a noble victim selected from the great flock, an acceptable sacrifice to Almighty God, said, 'Father of Thy well-beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of Thee, the God of angels and powers, and all creation, and of all the family of the righteous that live before Thee, I bless Thee that Thou hast thought me worthy of the present day and hour, to have a share in the number of the martyrs and in the cross of Christ, unto the resurrection of eternal life, both of the soul and body, in the incorruptible felicity of the Holy Spirit, among whom may I be received in Thy sight this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou the faithful and true God hast prepared, hast revealed, and fulfilled. Wherefore, on this account, and for all things I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy well-beloved Son, through whom glory be to Thee with Him in the Holy Ghost, both now and for ever.'" After the prayer the executioners kindled the fire and great flames arose. "The flames," we read, 'presented an appearance like an oven; as when the sail of a vessel is filled with the wind; and thus formed a wall round the body of the martyr. And he was in the midst not like burning flesh, but like gold and silver purified in the furnace. We also perceived

a fragrant odour, like the fumes of incense, or some other precious aromatic drugs. At length the wicked persecutors, seeing that the body could not be consumed by fire, commanded the executioner to draw near to him and to plunge his sword into him; and when he had done this, such a quantity of blood gushed forth that the fire was extinguished."

It is not improbable that the fate of Polycarp induced Antoninus with his desire for well-ordered government to direct that the Christians should not suffer unless judicially sentenced to punishment. In his reign, or much more probably in that of his successor, Marcus Aurelius, occurred the death of the apologist who is known as Justin Martyr. Justin was born about the year 114 in Flavia Neapolis, a city of Samaria. In one of his writings he tells how, after trying one system of philosophy after another in the hope of finding a religion to satisfy his soul, he met an old man who directed him to the Prophets and the Scriptures of the Church, and exhorted him to pray "that the gates of light might be opened to him." He read these writings and marked the patience and steadfastness of the men who suffered for their faith, and confessed the Name for which he was one day to die. In his apologies and speeches he was the strong advocate of the Christians and the champion of their religion, and as he was fearless in his mission, even in Rome itself, he roused the wrath of the opponents whose arguments he attacked. One of these men, Crescens the Cynic, whom Justin had publicly silenced

n argument, was probably the accuser who denounced
im to the Roman authorities. Justin was cast into
rison and then led with four companions before
Rusticus the magistrate, who was one of the Stoic
nstructors of Marcus Aurelius. The Stoic and the
Christian, representatives of a philosophy and a religion
hen contending for spiritual supremacy, were placed
pposite each other, and it was the follower of the
Crucified One who had the courage to face the punish-
ment of death which the other had the power to impose.
Justin in his second Apology tells a story which illus-
rates the power of Christianity to change the conduct
f men and to give them strength to endure suffering.
A Roman citizen and his wife were leading a sinful
ife, when one day the man observed a change in the
abits of the woman. He suspected that she had
become a Christian, and made a public charge against
er. For some reason her trial was postponed, and
ltimately the husband withdrew the charge against
er, only to make it against one Ptolemæus, who had
been the cause of her conversion. Ptolemæus was
entenced to death, and at the trial a spectator,
Lucius, asked the magistrate how he could condemn
man for simply confessing himself a Christian.
"You, too, seem to be a Christian," said the magistrate.
Lucius replied that he was, and was forthwith con-
demned. A third person who was present came
forward professing to be a Christian, and he also was
led forth to death.

The martyrdom of Felicitas and her seven sons is

attributed in an ancient document, "Acts of St Felicitas," to the instigation of Antoninus Pius, though it now seems certain that he did not himself authorise any persecution. These Acts serve to show the stories relished by the members of the Church in an age when the martyrs were honoured as pre-eminently the Christian saints. Felicitas was a rich widow, who with her seven sons was well known in Roman society. In a time of calamity certain pagan priests represented to the emperor that this woman by her deeds of Christian piety had brought down the anger of the gods upon the people; and by imperial command the Prefect, Publius, was required to see that she and her sons sacrificed to the gods. The Prefect endeavoured to persuade her to make the sacrifices; but she, declaring that the Holy Spirit would strengthen her against the evil one, said: "I am assured that while I live I shall be the victor in my contest with you, and if you cause me to be put to death I shall be still more a conqueror." Publius replied: "Unhappy one, if it is pleasant for you to die, at least let your sons live." "My sons," said Felicitas, "will surely live if they do not consent to sacrifice to idols. But if they commit this crime of sacrificing they will die eternally." The first attempt of the magistrate failed, and a public trial was ordered. At this trial, when urged to have pity on her sons, Felicitas addressed them saying: "Look up to heaven where Christ with His Saints is waiting for you, fight the good fight for your souls, and show yourselves

faithful in the love of Christ." The young men were questioned one by one. Januarius, the eldest, who was offered a rich reward if he sacrificed, and scourging if he refused, made answer: "The wisdom of the Lord will support me and enable me to endure all." He was ordered to be scourged and was led away. The second son also refused to sacrifice, saying: "We adore one God to whom we offer the sacrifice of prayers: never suppose that you will separate me or my brothers from the love of the Lord Jesus Christ; our faith will never be overcome or be changed by any of your threats." The other brothers were no less faithful in their confessions, and at last, when the emperor had read the report of the trial, he ordered the accused to be executed. Felicitas and three of the sons were beheaded; three of the others were beaten to death with whips; the last was thrown down from a height, that he might be killed.

The part taken by the emperor has led many to place the trial of Felicitas and her sons in the time of Marcus Aurelius, the great ruler who succeeded Antoninus in the year 161, and who showed himself, in his guardianship of the old religion, no friend of the Christians. Marcus Aurelius, by the care of Antoninus, was educated under capable teachers. The Stoics, who had in him their greatest pupil, were incensed against the Christians, who were making progress in all parts of the empire, and doubtless they prejudiced his mind. Fronto, his friend and tutor, wrote a book against Christianity. Marcus, indeed,

was no fanatical or unscrupulous oppressor of the Christians, but he did not view them with favour. They professed a religion which contained supernatural elements likely to appear mere superstitions to a Stoic; and in the zeal for martyrdom, which many displayed, they violated the Stoic precepts regarding calmness in the hour of death. Virtue after the Stoic ideal was the piety of Marcus, but for the State, which he would maintain in its greatness, he deemed the ceremonies of the old Roman religion to be needful. The Christians, as has been noted, could not be good citizens whenever attention to these ceremonies was required, and amidst the famines, floods, epidemics, which were frequent in this reign, the popular cry arose against the Christians as the guilty causes of the troubles. It is difficult to believe that a man with the mind of Marcus Aurelius could believe that the Christians had angered the gods, as it is hard to understand how he could have faith in these very gods. Yet it must be accepted that he looked with scorn on the opponents of the imperial religion, and instead of tolerating them as far as possible, as had been done by his immediate predecessors, he seems to have allowed the magistrates to seek out the Christians and punish them as enemies of the State. Celsus, the Pagan writer of the *True Word,* spoke of them as being sought out for punishment. Melito, the apologist, writing about the year 170, declared that new edicts had been published against them, and even asserted that informers were

ewarded with a share of the goods confiscated from
ne Christians. Athenagoras, another of the apologists
f the period, wrote that the confession of the name
f Christ was enongh to ensure the punishment of
eath. It seems only too true that the great emperor,
spite of his virtue, which left him not far from the
ingdom of heaven, did not imitate the tolerance of
rajan, Hadrian or Antoninus, but in his piety and in
is zeal for the State religion adopted the aggressive
olicy of the cruel and mean Domitian. And yet
ertullian, the famous Christian apologist, spoke of
im for some reason as one of the protectors of the
hristians. At Lyons and Vienne, in the ancient
erritory of Gaul, a persecution took place, the most
olent of the attacks of the second century, which has
deed given the name of Marcus Aurelius an in-
mous reputation in the history of the Christian
hurch. Admirers of the emperor have attempted to
ow that amidst the cares of the State he was ignor-
nt of the events which were taking place in Gaul. It
more than probable that he was not directly respon-
ble for the attacks on the Christians of Lyons and
ienne; but, on the other hand, it may be safely
serted that the attitude of Marcus towards the
hristians would be known throughout the empire,
d that open hostility to them would not merit his
spleasure. Eusebius has preserved in his *History*
official document sent from Gaul to the Churches
Asia and Phrygia, and from this writing, not im-
obably the work of the great Irenæus, the facts of

the persecution may be learned. In Lyons and Vienne the Christians began to be subjected to petty annoyances. They were excluded from private houses, public baths, and the markets. They suffered blows at the hands of their neighbours, were plundered and robbed, stoned and imprisoned. Then followed a public interrogation in the forum by the tribune and the authorities of the city, after which they were again imprisoned till the arrival of the governor, who dealt severely with them. Vettius Epagathus, a man of eminent position, protested against the treatment of the Christians and desired to be heard on their behalf. The magistrate asked him concerning his faith, and when he confessed that he was a Christian "he was transferred to the number of martyrs, being publicly called the advocate of the Christians." Others were put to death, but ten are mentioned who had not the courage to be faithful. At last all the zealous members of the two Churches were seized, and slaves of the households, themselves pagans, were called as witnesses against their masters. They charged them with the foulest immoralities and crimes, and the feeling of the populace against them was lashed into fury. The deacon of the Church of Vienne, Maturus a new convert, but "a noble champion of the Faith," Attalus, "a pillar of the Church," are numbered among the victims. One Sanctus, to every question put to him, had but the answer, "I am a Christian." After many tortures red-hot plates of brass were fastened to his body. Biblias, one of those who were at first un

ithful, repented, and confessing herself a Christian, as tortured, and by death was added to the number f the martyrs. Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, an old an of over ninety years, frail of body, was dragged efore the tribunal. When asked, "Who is the God of ie Christians?" he replied, "If thou art worthy, thou halt know." As he was carried away to be beaten, e was attacked by men throwing at him "whatsoever ney had at hand." He was at last cast into prison, here he died. Maturus, Sanctus, Blandina, and ttalus, we are told, were thrown to the wild beasts the amphitheatre; and when Maturus and Sanctus ere found not to be dead, they were roasted on an on chair. Blandina, the maid-servant of a Christian oman who was herself suffering, gave evidence of ich extraordinary power of endurance, that her rmentors confessed they had nothing more to inflict on her. In her punishment she was bound to a ake and exposed to the wild beasts; and in this sition she strengthened her companions with her ayers. On the first occasion in the arena none of e beasts would touch her, and she had to be taken ck to it on another day.

When she reappeared she had with her her brother, youth of about fifteen years. Pontius, the boy, was bjected to many torments, but encouraged and in- ired by his sister he "nobly bore the whole of these fferings and gave up his life." Of Blandina herself, is told that "after scourging, after exposure to the asts, after roasting, she was finally thrown into a

net and cast before a bull, and when she had beer well tossed by the animal, and had now no longer any sense of what was done to her by reason of her firm hope, confidence, faith, and her communion with Christ, she too was despatched."

Attalus, another victim, who was led about the arena, had a tablet fastened to him on which were marked the words: "This is Attalus, the Christian." The magistrate, learning that he was a Roman citizen ordered him to be taken back to prison till the will o the emperor should be ascertained. At last, he and those who were Roman citizens were sentenced to be beheaded; but to satisfy the crowd, Attalus wa placed on the iron chair, and as he was dying h said: "Lo, this is to devour men, what you ar doing. But as to us, we neither devour men no commit any other evil." The words had referenc to the charge of cannibalism, arising out of th reports about eating the body and drinking th blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Alexander, physician by profession, perished without a word The account of the persecution in Gaul, the truth o which there is no reason to doubt, shows us th forces of barbarism let loose against the Christian and reveals the character of the Roman world whic it was the mission of the Christian Church to chang It may be that the emperor was unaware of th cruelties which were perpetrated, and it may be tha he was ignorant, too, of the real character of th Christians; but the testimony of the Apologists i

cates that he desired the followers of Christ to be
ught out and punished as enemies of the State, and
consequence of his policy the tragic scenes in Lyons
d Vienne took place. The last of these scenes was
e consuming of the remains of the martyrs, that the
hes might be cast into the waters of the Rhone.
ne pagan worshippers of the gods seemed to be
raid that the mangled bodies of the dead might be
verenced, and converts added to the Christian ranks.
Eusebius does not give the exact number of the
ctims; but later writers have stated that eighteen
ed in prison, six were thrown to the beasts in the
ena, while twenty-four perished in other ways.
usebius adds to the epistle his own significant
ords: "Such were the occurrences that befell the
urch of Christ under the above-mentioned emperor,
om which it is easy to conjecture what was the
obable course of things in the remaining provinces."

Questions.

I. *In what way was the rescript of Hadrian more favourable than Trajan's to the Christians?*
II. *What martyrdoms have been ascribed to Hadrian's reign?*
II. *What was the character of Antoninus Pius?*
V. *What were the circumstances of Polycarp's death?*
V. *Who was Justin? Why was Martyr added to his name?*
I. *What generally was the attitude of Marcus Aurelius towards the Christians?*
II. *What were the main events of the persecution in Lyons and Vienne?*

CHAPTER IV

From the period of Marcus Aurelius to that of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, the history of the Church presents in some ways the same outward aspect as it does in the period from Nero to Marcus. There was persecution from time to time, and in spite of it the Church increased.

"There is no race of men," said Justin Martyr, "whether Greek or barbarian, among whom prayers and thanks are not offered up in the name of the Crucified." Tertullian wrote: "We are but of yesterday, and we fill all your cities, islands, forts, councils, even the camps themselves, the tribes, the decuries, the palaces, the senate, and the forum." Questions of discipline disturbed the Church, questions, too, of heresy; and throughout the years there was the movement of thought, seen in the development of doctrine. But the tragic fact in the experience of the Church during its first three centuries was the persistence of persecution. For the Christian there was no security of life or property. Much depended, as has been noted, on the character of the emperor and on the caprice or policy of the local magistrates. Persecution, which in time became general throughout the empire, was intended to stamp out Christianity; but it failed because religion involved eternal issues, and for those whose very souls were dominated by Christ, death was no serious element in the reckoning.

here were many, naturally, who fell away, as the ord Himself had foretold. Yet many were steadfast rough all their trials; and the excellence of their nduct, on the one hand, while yet they were living nong the degraded followers of the pagan gods, and, n the other, the bravery with which they met threats nd tortures for the sake of their religion, attracted any earnest men to Christianity, who found in it the ay to life eternal. Marcus Aurelius, among the mperors, was almost the last noble product of pagan- m. After him there was hardly one of those who t on the throne and who guarded the worship of the ods, who was worthy to be the representative of the aditions of a great empire. Many of the citizens erefore turned away from the official religion of the tate to the religion bearing the name of the Crucified ne. Thinkers will differ regarding the secret of the rogress of the Christian Church in its centuries of pression. Gibbon offended the Christian world of s day by his theory of the secondary causes of that rogress. Yet one thing remains, that advance was ade in spite, or, it may be, on account of the persecu- ons which harassed the faithful and made martyrs for hrist.

Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius, who cended the imperial throne in the year 180, was sorderly in character and a ruffian in manner. His vourite sport was the ignoble business of the adiator, and the Emperor of Rome took the pay as e played the part of a gladiator in the public arena.

Eusebius wrote that "many of those eminent at Rome for their wealth and kindred, with their whole home and family, yielded to their salvation," and it may be conjectured that these converts were not a little influenced in their spiritual change by their dissatisfaction with the growing but inevitable degradation of an empire morally sustained by paganism. Thanks to the fact that not a few Christians were officials in the Court, and also to the fact that Commodus himself cared nothing for the ancient religion of which he was the recognised guardian, the later part of his reign was a time of peace for the Christians. But in the earlier part there were many who suffered for the Faith : though more than probably he was ignorant of the fate of these men, whose highest interest lay in a spiritual region beyond his concern. By command of Vigellius Saturninus, pro-consul of Africa in 180, certain men with native African names were put to death as martyrs. Nothing more is known than the bare record of their names and death. While the same man was pro-consul a persecution occurred in Scillium, a Roman colony in the north of Africa. Several prominent men among the Christians of that place were taken to Carthage, where they were sentenced to death for refusing to sacrifice to the gods. Saturninus, endeavouring to turn them from what he deemed their superstition, allowed them thirty days for deliberation, but the days simply strengthened their faith. From an ancient document it appears that besides these, twelve men were tried

a Carthage and afterwards beheaded. One of them, peratus, answering the demand of Saturninus to wear by the genius of the emperor, said: "I know o sovereignty of this present world, but I praise and dore my God, whom no man hath seen, whom ıortal eyes cannot behold, but whose true light eveals itself in the believing heart."

A few years after the trial in Carthage, a strange ever of excitement seized the people of a district in sia, while Arrius Antoninus was pro-consul. We are old by Tertullian that "the whole Christians of the rovince, in one united band, presented themselves efore the judgment-seat; on which, ordering a few o be led forth to execution, Arrius Antoninus said to ıe rest, 'O miserable men, if you wish to die, you ave precipices or halters.'" A Roman magistrate ould not understand the fervour which led men to ie for what he conceived to be a mere superstition; ut sometimes, it must be admitted, the love of ıartyrdom passed into fanaticism, and men sought eath, as did those of whom Tertullian wrote, as if lory lay in it rather than in steadfast faith.

Eusebius narrates the fate of one Apollonius, re- owned for learning and wisdom, who suffered in the eign of Commodus. Though the accused man was entenced to be beheaded, yet the informer was unished by having his limbs broken. Apollonius, we re told, at the earnest desire and entreaty of the judge, ave an account of himself, and delivered a most elo- uent defence of the Faith for which he was suffering.

It is impossible to state with exactness the numbers of the martyrs, perhaps thousands, who perished in the second century, or to estimate the proportion of the Christians to the pagans in the Empire at the close of that period. The writers of the early Church spoke of the number of the martyrs as very great, and certainly the spread of Christianity alarmed the upholders of the old religion, and probably accounted in a large measure for the persecution which took place in the time of the Emperor Septimius Severus. It is to be remembered, however, that while the attitude of the State to Christianity was one of continued opposition, that opposition was largely tempered with toleration, so that the advance of the Church was not greatly hindered. There was certainly no security for the followers of Christ, who might be attacked, as in the time of Pliny the younger, by those who thought their trade injured by the spread of the new religion. The fury of the people, as in Smyrna when Polycarp perished, might rise like a storm with its destroying power. Yet the empire was vast, the population was enormous, and, in spite of persecution, or perhaps helped by it, the Church of Christ advanced. In an examination of the experience of the Christians in a pagan community, it is to be borne in mind that their sufferings were not always unprovoked. Where many professed the Christian Faith there would be some without grace of manners, and some with fanatical zeal for mere trifles. M. Renan has said: "The saddest episodes of persecution under Marcus Aurelius arose from

the hatred of the people. At every famine, inundation and epidemic, the cry, 'The Christians to the lions,' resounded like a gloomy menace. . . . The attitude of the Christians, in the midst of all this, remained obstinately disdainful, or even provocative. Often they received their condemnation with an insult to the judge. Before a temple or an idol they breathed hard, as if to repulse an impure thing, or made the sign of the cross. It was not rare to see a Christian stop before a statue of Jupiter or Apollo, and to say to it as he struck it with his staff: 'Ah well, you see, your god does not avenge you.' The temptation was strong in such a case to arrest the sacrilegious one and to crucify him, saying, 'And does your God avenge you?'" An incident is recorded by Tertullian which illustrates the provocation which fanatics among the Christians gave to their pagan neighbours; and though that famous Christian writer drew attention to the incident for the purpose of glorifying it, it will now strike men of calm and sober judgment as being an instance of fanaticism. "The bounty of our most excellent emperors" (Severus and his sons), wrote Tertullian, "was being dispensed in the camp; the soldiers, laurel-crowned, were approaching. One of them, more a soldier of God, more steadfast than the rest of his brethren, who had imagined that they could serve two masters, his head alone uncovered, the useless crown in his hand—already even by that peculiarity known to everyone as a Christian—was nobly conspicuous. Accordingly, all began to mark

him out, jeering him at a distance, gnashing on him near at hand. The murmur is wafted to the tribune, when the person had just left the ranks. The tribune at once puts the question to him, 'Why are you so different in your attire?' He declared that he had no liberty to wear the crown with the rest. Being urgently asked for his reasons, he answered, 'I'm a Christian.'" After a trial the soldier was imprisoned and, Tertullian added, "crowned more worthily with the white crown of martyrdom, he waits in prison the largess of Christ."

In the year 193, in which Commodus died by assassination, Septimius Severus, though not as his immediate successor, was raised to the imperial throne. At first he seemed to favour rather than to oppose the Christians, but about the year 202 he completely changed his attitude. Eusebius records that "when Severus raised a persecution against the Churches there were illustrious testimonies given everywhere in all the Churches by the champions of religion. They particularly abounded in Alexandria, whilst the heroic wrestlers from Egypt and Thebais were escorted thither as to a mighty theatre of God, where, by their invincible patience under various tortures and modes of death, they were adorned with crowns from heaven." In another passage he declares, "at that time many thousands were crowned with martyrdom." Tertullian, in his *Apology*, complained, "We are daily beset by foes, we are daily betrayed, we are oftentimes surprised in our meetings and congregations"; and in another

writing, *Ad Nationes*, he said, "You know the very days of our assemblies; therefore we are both besieged and attacked, and kept prisoners actually in our secret congregations." It was probably in connection with the persecution under Severus that Tertullian wrote the inspiring address, *Ad Martyras*, which begins with the words, "Blessed Martyrs designate." It is remarkable, in spite of the statements of Eusebius regarding the numbers who perished in this persecution, how few actual details are known of the history of individual martyrs. It is not determined whether the emperor published a new edict, or, following the custom of his predecessors, simply made known by his rescripts his feelings towards the Christians. There is no certain proof that an edict was published, but it is probable that, urged by the upholders of the old religion, and alarmed by the progress of Christianity, witnessed by himself in such places as Alexandria, he determined to check the advance. The persecution raged chiefly in Africa, though it was also felt throughout the whole empire, and certainly in Rome itself. Modern investigations serve to show that the Catacomb of St Callistus, which was being made in the time of Pope Zephyrinus, *c.* 202, was abruptly changed in design, as if to afford secret hiding places, and also means of escape. The first of the martyrs in Africa mentioned by Eusebius as dying in the reign of Severus, was Leonides, "said to be" the father of the famous Origen. Leonides was beheaded, and before the execution the youthful

Origen wrote to him the words, "Take heed not to change thy mind on account of us," that he might not be tempted for the sake of his wife and sons to deny his faith. We read also that Plutarch was "led away to die"; that Severus presented in the fire "a proof of that unshaken faith which he had received"; that Heraclides and Heron and another Severus were beheaded, while Herais, "after receiving her baptism by fire, departed this life." Potamiæna, who was celebrated for her beauty, was also distinguished for her courage amidst many tortures. She and her mother Macella were committed to the flames; and of Potamiæna it is told that the judge, Aquila, applied the severest tortures to her on every part of her body, and, in particular, that boiling pitch was poured over her, from her feet to the crown of her head. Basilides, an officer who had charge of her in her last punishments, showed sympathy by protecting her from the insults of the multitude, and was exhorted by her to be of good cheer, since, after she was gone, she would intercede for him with her Lord. Not long afterwards, when requested to take an oath, he refused, saying that he was a Christian. He was imprisoned, and in prison was baptised, and afterwards was led forth to be beheaded. He declared that Potamiæna, three days after her martyrdom, appeared to him, and placing a crown upon his head, said that she had interceded with the Lord for him, and that before long he would be taken.

An ancient writing, "The Passion of the Holy

Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas," narrates the suffering and death of certain martyrs who probably perished at Carthage in the persecution inspired by Severus. The writing is minute in its details, and is free from exaggerations of speech and impossible incidents, so common in Acts of martyrs. According to the narrative, the young catechumens, Revocatus and Felicitas, Saturninus and Sucundulus, were taken prisoners, and with them Vivia Perpetua. Perpetua was a young married woman, about twenty-two years of age, of good family and well educated. Her father and mother were alive, and she had two brothers, and also an infant of her own. In a part of the narrative, supposed to have been written by herself, she says: 'While we were still with the persecutors, my father was persisting in seeking to turn me away. 'Father,' said I, 'do you see this vessel to be a pitcher or something else?' 'I see it to be so,' he replied. And I answered, 'Can it be called by any other name than what it is?' And he said, 'No.' 'Neither can I call myself anything else than what I am, a Christian!' My father threw himself on me, as if he would tear my eyes out. A few days afterwards we were baptised, and the spirit prescribed that in the water (of baptism) nothing else was to be sought for than bodily endurance. Again, after a few days, we were taken into the dungeon, and I was very much afraid, because I had never felt such darkness. I was wrung with solicitude for my infant." Perpetua proceeds to relate how by the good offices of two deacons the prisoners were

allowed to spend some hours each day in a better part of the prison, and how she attended to her child. At first she pined away through anxiety, but she recovered strength, and the prison became to her like a palace. One day her brother said to her, "Perpetua, you are exalted to such dignity that you may pray for a vision, and it shall be shown you whether our doom is martyrdom or release." The vision came to her. She beheld a lofty golden ladder, ascending to heaven: on the sides of the ladder were swords, lances, hooks, daggers, so that if any one went up carelessly he would be torn to pieces: under the ladder was a great dragon, lying in wait for those who should ascend. Saturus, one who had surrendered himself after the others had been taken, was the first to ascend, and he beckoned to Perpetua to follow. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ she controlled the dragon, and reached the top of the ladder, where she found herself in a great garden, in which was a white-haired man, in the dress of a shepherd, milking his sheep, and thousands of white-robed ones were around him. "Thou art welcome, my daughter," he said, and gave her a morsel of cheese, which she ate, and all who stood around said "Amen." She woke from the vision with a sweet taste in her mouth, and knew that martyrdom was at hand.

A few days after the vision there was a rumour that the trial would shortly take place. Her father came to plead with Perpetua, but his mission was in vain. He went away sorrowing, when she had said, "What-

ver God wills shall happen. Know that we are not
n our own power, but that of God." Another day
he and her companions were suddenly taken out for
rial. Perpetua saw her father holding her child, and
aying, "Have pity on your babe!" The procurator
ddressed her with the words, "Spare the grey hairs
f your father. Spare the infancy of your boy, offer
acrifice for the well-being of the emperor." She
efused to sacrifice; and, after being asked, "Are you
Christian?" replied, "I am a Christian." Her
ather stood entreating her, but he was ordered to
tand away, and she had the pain of seeing the old man
eing beaten. The magistrate condemned her and her
iends to be thrown to the wild beasts. After the
ondemnation visions came to Perpetua. In one of
hese she beheld a young brother who had died of
ancer, and had passed from earth without being
aptised. By her prayers she secured the healing of
is body, and his redemption from the place of punish-
ent. Saturus also had his vision, and beheld himself
ith Perpetua being carried by the angels into the
reat light, where they saw the martyrs, and also into
ie presence of the Most High. "And we came near
a place, the walls of which were such as if they
ere built of light, and before the gate of that place
ood four angels, who clothed those who entered
ith white robes. And, being clothed, we entered
id saw the boundless light, and heard the united
oice of some who said without ceasing, 'Holy! Holy!
oly!'"

Before the day appointed for the spectacle in the arena, Secundulus, one of the prisoners, died, and to Felicitas a child was born. When that day did arrive the prisoners were led forth. The men were required to dress as priests of Saturn, and the women as priestesses of Ceres, but all refused; and as they passed to the amphitheatre they were scourged. There the men were exposed to leopards and bears; the women were hung up naked in nets to be gored by a fierce cow. The multitude, however, had some compassion on the two young and gentle women, and they were taken from the nets and clad in loose robes. Then once more they were led back to the arena. "Perpetua was tossed and fell on her loins; and when she saw her tunic torn from her side she drew it over her, rather mindful of her modesty than her suffering. Then she was called for again, and bound up her dishevelled hair, for it was not becoming for a martyr to suffer with dishevelled hair, lest she should appear to be mourning in her glory. So she rose up, and when she saw Felicitas crushed, she approached and gave her her hand, and lifted her up. And both of them stood together; and the brutality of the populace being appeased, they were recalled. Then Perpetua was received by a certain one who was still a catechumen, Rusticus by name, who kept close to her, and she, as if aroused from sleep, so deeply had she been in the spirit and in an ecstasy, began to look round her, and to say, to the amazement of all, 'I cannot tell when we are to be led out to that

ow.' And when she heard what had already happened, she did not believe it, until she had perceived certain signs of injury to her body and in her dress, and had recognised the catechumen. Afterwards, causing the catechumen and her brother to approach, she addressed them, saying, 'Stand fast in the faith, and love one another all of you, and be not offended at my sufferings.'" Saturus, it was narrated, was thrown to a leopard, and, at the end, he and the other sufferers were despatched by the sword. Of Perpetua, it is said, with a touch of extravagance, that she, "being pierced between the ribs, in order that she might taste some pain, cried out loudly, and she herself placed the wavering hand of the youthful gladiator to her throat." The unknown writer of the latter part of these "Acts" of Perpetua and Felicitas concludes with these words: "O, most brave and blessed martyrs! O, truly called and chosen into the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ! Whom whoever magnifies and honours and adores assuredly ought to read these examples for the edification of the Church, not less than the ancient ones, so that new virtues also may testify that one and the same Holy Spirit is always operating even until now, and God the Father Omnipotent, and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, whose is the glory and infinite power, for ever and ever. Amen."

Severus died at York in 211, after an attempt to subdue the Scottish Highlands, and was succeeded by his sons Caracalla and Geta. Under Caracalla, who

soon after his accession reigned alone, the persecution of the Christians gradually ceased, and the fact that his foster-mother was a Christian may have influenced his treatment of the Church. From the second year of his reign till the time of the Emperor Decius there was peace for the Church, except during a short period in the reign of Maximinus Thrax. The most remarkable, in one way, of all the emperors was Heliogabalus, whose name was derived from the Syrian word for the sun, and who himself had been a priest of Baalpeor, before he ascended the throne. In Rome he celebrated the festival of his god with great pomp, and even marched or danced at the head of his religious processions. Many of the Roman citizens of the old distinguished families were shocked, especially as the grossest sensuality was mixed with the religious ceremonies. Commodus the gladiator of degraded habits and vulgar manners had been pronounced divine after his death, and serious men inquired into the character of the paganism which justified his deification. Heliogabalus, as the guardian of the old religion of Rome, neglected it, as he professed the obscene worship of his eastern god, and again the men of earnest spirit were turned away in disgust from the practices of an emperor. Opposite the Roman religion represented by Commodus, and sun worship with its vile rites represented by Heliogabalus, stood Christianity with its doctrine of God as the Most High, and its morality pure and undefiled.

In the year 222 Alexander Severus, a boy of sixteen

ucceeded his cousin Heliogabalus, and the young mperor, though not truly a Christian, was, it may be aid, not far from the religion of Christ. His mother, ccording to many writers, was a pious woman, eager o search out the things of religion, and Alexander vas strongly influenced by her. Many Christians vere employed in his household, and in his oratory he ad images of Isis, Serapis, and Orpheus, but also of Abraham and Christ. He was not a Christian, it is vident, since he had other gods besides Christ; but e honoured the Saviour, and His followers were not exed with persecution. There was, indeed, no State ecognition of Christianity, and the regulations against he Christians were not repealed; but there was peace or them, and churches began to be erected, so that heir worship was no longer in secret. In spite of mperors who were tolerant, popular risings could not lways be prevented; and in one of these, Callistus, he bishop of Rome, perished.

Alexander was murdered in 235, and Maximin the Thracian succeeded. Gibbon describes him, as he rst appears on the stage of history, as "a young arbarian of gigantic stature"; and Milman speaks of im as a "Thracian savage." The young barbarian was aid to be eight feet high, and his height and strength ndeared him to the soldiers, who were the real king-akers of the third century. Maximin, though not ne actual perpetrator, was undoubtedly the cause of ne murder of his predecessor, and his opposition to ne Christians was most probably due to the fact that

they had been befriended by Alexander. Eusebius narrates that Maximin "raised a persecution, and commanded at first only the heads of the Churches to be slain, as the abettors and agents of evangelical truth." Pontianus the bishop of Rome, and Hippolytus the presbyter, were transported to Sardinia. The bishop was subjected to torture and scourging so that he died. His successor in the bishopric perished a short time after his elevation, and it is supposed that he was included among the martyrs. The learned Christian writer Origen of the third century tells how the persecution was severe at Cappadocia, as it was at Alexandria; and while it raged he wrote an exhortation to the martyrs. His book was dedicated to Ambrose and Protoctetus, who suffered much, though they were not actually martyred. Referring evidently to Ambrose, who was a rich married man, Origen wrote: "We the poor must yield in the glory of such a trial to those who sacrifice glory, property, and love of children." In another of his writings Origen narrates that Maximin's hatred of the Christians had its effect on the populace in many parts of the empire. Again and again the old story was repeated, that the Christians were to be blamed for the earthquakes, pestilences, famines, and wars, since these were manifestations of the anger of the gods whose worship was being neglected through the influence of the Christian teachers. Origen tells the sad tale that in this display of fanaticism many Christians suffered, and many churches were destroyed.

Questions.

I. *What was the attitude of Commodus towards the Christians? What martyrdoms took place during his reign?*

II. *Is there any proof that the Christians ever provoked opposition?*

III. *Who were the martyrs who perished under Septimius Severus?*

IV. *What are the main facts in the story of Perpetua and Felicitas?*

V. *How did the practices of men like Commodus and Heliogabalus affect the progress of the Church?*

VI. *How was the Church treated by Alexander Severus and by Maximinus Thrax?*

CHAPTER V

The persecution under Maximin interrupted the peace enjoyed by the Church from the reign of Caracalla to the beginning of that of Decius, who in 249 ascended the throne. In that period the Emperor Philip the Arabian was so friendly to the Church that it has been conjectured that he was himself a Christian. Undoubtedly he was no enemy, but he did not neglect the pagan ceremonies of worship which his exalted position required him to perform. Decius, who succeeded him, was not ignorant of the preparations for the revolt in which Philip perished, and with the new reign another era of persecution was begun. The long-continued peace may have caused the Christians

to forget that political changes might be dangerous to them; and, certainly, the troubles under Decius seem to have come as a surprise. Origen, writing in days of prosperity, said Providence "has extended day by day the Christian religion, so that it is now preached everywhere with boldness"; and, again, "every form of worship will be destroyed except the religion of Christ, which will alone prevail." In spite of his hopeful words he was not blind to the effect of peace, which appeared to him to account for a decadence of faith which he mourned. Cyprian, too, the celebrated Bishop of Carthage, saw this decadence, and denounced the pride, luxury and greed of the clergy and the worldliness of the laymen.

Decius, who may have been inspired by the traditions of the great Roman name he bore, set himself to crush that religion which, to his thinking, ministered to the decline of the empire. In the *History of European Morals* it is said by Mr Lecky that "the Decian persecution which broke out in A.D. 249, and was probably begun in hopes of restoring the empire to its ancient discipline, and eliminating from it all extraneous and unpatriotic influences, is the first example of a deliberate attempt, supported by the whole machinery of provincial government, and extending over the entire surface of the empire, to extirpate Christianity from the world." Everywhere martyrs were added to the splendid roll, but the Christians were so numerous that even a Nero would have hesitated to order their destruction. Decius con-

ented himself with torturing men into obedience o the State. He required all Christians to sacrifice o the gods, or to burn incense before the statue of he emperor, and to procure a certificate that they ad obeyed. Never before had such overwhelming alamity threatened the Church, and never before had anger inspired such terror among those who named he Name of Christ. The faithful, and those fortuately were not a few, beheld many of their associates acrificing to the gods, or, worse still, purchasing certicates that they had conformed, though they had not.

Reversing the policy of many of his predecessors, Decius desired the Christians to be sought out, and nade the way of informers easy. Amidst the troubles ome of the bishops, notably Dionysius of Alexandria nd Cyprian of Carthage, advised flight, and they hemselves left their sees. Among those who fled hen were some like Paul, the hermit of Thebaid, who id not return, even when at liberty, but finished heir days as anchorites.

One of the first victims of the Decian persecution vas Fabian, Bishop of Rome, of whom a strange story vas told. When the brethren were gathered together o choose a bishop, Fabian, a layman recently come to he city, was present. A dove, it was said, settled on is head, and he was instantly received with acclamaion by the people and led to the episcopal chair. Another of the victims was Alexander, Bishop of erusalem, who had suffered imprisonment under everus. "After an eminent perseverance in his

profession, though crowned with the hoary locks of venerable age," he was again cast into prison, where he died. Babylus, Bishop of Antioch, also died during his imprisonment. Eusebius has preserved an interesting document which gives details regarding some of the sufferers at Alexandria.

"The persecutions with us," we read, "did not begin with the imperial edict, but preceded it a whole year. And a certain prophet and poet excited the mass of the heathen against us, stirring them up to their native superstition. First, then, seizing a certain aged man, named Metra, they called upon him to utter impious expressions, and as he did not obey, they beat his body with clubs, and pricked his face and eyes; after which they led him away to the suburbs, where they stoned him. Next they led a woman called Quinta, who was a believer, to the temple of an idol, and attempted to force her to worship; but when she turned away in disgust they tied her by the feet, and dragged her through the whole city, over the rough stones of the paved streets, dashing her against the millstones, and scourging her at the same time, until they brought her to the same place, where they stoned her. . . . They also seized that admirable virgin, Apollonia, then in advanced age, and beating her jaws, they broke all her teeth, and kindling a fire before the city, threatened to burn her alive unless she would repeat their impious expressions. She appeared at first to shrink a little, but when suffered to go she suddenly sprang into the fire and was consumed.

They also seized a certain Serapion in his own house, and after torturing him with the severest cruelties, and breaking all his limbs, threw him headlong from an upper story." The document proceeds to show how there came a time of calm after these first persecutions, and how the cruelties were begun afresh and with greater severity after the publication of an imperial edict. "Julian, a man afflicted with the gout, neither able to walk nor stand, with two others that carried him, was arraigned. Of these, the one immediately denied, but the other, named Cronion, and the aged Julian himself, having confessed the Lord, were carried on camels throughout the city, and in his elevation were scourged, and finally were consumed in an immense fire, surrounded by the thronging crowd of citizens. But a soldier, whose name was Besas, standing near them, who had opposed the insolence of the multitude, whilst the martyrs were led away to execution, was himself assailed with their loud vociferations, and then this brave soldier of God, after he had excelled in the great conflict of piety, was beheaded. Another, who was a Lybian by birth, after much solicitation from the judge to have him renounce, still remained inflexible and was burnt alive. After these, Epimachus and Alexander, who had continued for a long time in prison, enduring innumerable sufferings from the scourges and scrapers were also destroyed in an immense fire. With these were also four women: Ammonarium, a holy virgin, who was ingeniously tortured for a very long time by

The most remarkable of the stories associated with the Decian persecution is that of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, which was first told in Western Literature, in the sixth century, by Gregory of Tours. Seven young men, for the confession of their Christian Faith, were walled up in a cave, where they were left to die. They fell asleep, and when the cave was opened in the fifth century, they awoke and went forth, wondering at the strange sights they beheld. They saw that the temples of the pagan religion had been destroyed, and churches erected in their places. Once more they lay down together, and falling asleep, did not again awake.

Fortunately, with the reign of Decius, which was of short duration, the persecution ceased for a time. The emperor and his son perished in 251 in a battle fought against the Goths in Moesia. Gibbon described him as "an accomplished prince, active in war and affable in peace, who, together with his son, has deserved to be compared, both in life and death, with the brightest examples of ancient virtue." The Christians, however, had little reason to think of him as a man of conspicuous virtue or as a ruler enlightened in his policy.

Gallus succeeded Decius, and though at first he permitted the Church to progress in peace, he afterwards renewed the persecutions at a time when the plague was raging. The Christians, indeed, might have won admiration, since they watched over their plague-stricken brethren, and extended their care

even to those who were enemies of the Cross. Gallus, however, instituted special religious ceremonies, while the plague lasted, and when the Christians refused to take part in them they were punished.

Gallus was assassinated in 253, and Valerian was immediately raised to the throne. In a writing preserved by Eusebius it is said of Valerian, "Never was there any of the emperors before so favourably and benevolently disposed towards them. . . . All his house was filled with pious persons, and was indeed a congregation of the Lord." His friendly treatment of the Christians, however, was not to continue, and in his change of attitude he was probably influenced by Macrianus, chief of the Egyptian Magi.

In the years 257 and 258 edicts were published which bore heavily on the Christians. The first of these edicts has not been preserved; but there is evidence to show that it required bishops and other clerics to sacrifice to the gods, and, further, that it forbade all meetings of Christians for worship, and made illegal their visits to their cemeteries. "Those vast subterranean corridors," says Mr Leckie, "lined with tombs, and expanding very frequently into small chapels adorned with paintings, often of no mean beauty, had for a long period been an inviolable asylum in seasons of persecution. The extreme sanctity which the Romans were accustomed to attach to the place of burial repelled the profane; and, as early, it is said, as the very beginning of the third century, the catacombs were recognised as legal possessions of

the Church." Valerian evidently intended by his edict to destroy the organisation of the Church, since all clerics were to be banished if they did not yield obedience, and anyone who attended a meeting for worship or visited a cemetery could be punished by death.

Many ecclesiastics, such as Cyprian of Carthage and Dionysius of Alexandria, suffered exile, after the publication of the edict; but the emperor, not satisfied with the severity of his commands, issued another order in the year 258, in the form of a letter to the Senate. He decreed in reference to the Christians that the clerics should be put to death; that senators should be deprived of their rank and property, and, if they persisted in their Faith, should be put to death; that women of social position should lose their property and be exiled; and that court officials should be sent in chains to work on the imperial domains. Cyprian, from his banishment, when he had heard rumours of the change in Valerian's policy, sent messengers to discover the truth. They returned to tell him of the letter to the Senate, and of the death of Sixtus, the bishop of Rome. Soldiers were sent, it is narrated, to seek Sixtus, whom they found seated in the episcopal chair in a cemetery on the Appian road. Around him were friends who tried to protect him, but fearing they should suffer hurt, he pushed forward and was immediately beheaded. Six deacons perished with him, and were buried where they fell. Tradition tells that Laurence, the senior deacon, who was not present

at the arrest, hastened to the bishop to say farewell. "Whither goest thou, my father, without thy son?" he asked. Sixtus replied, "I shall not forsake you. Do not mourn me; greater trials are before thee, and thou wilt follow me in three days." Laurence was seized, and on the third day, we are told, was roasted to death on a gridiron. St Laurence became one of the popular saints, and many churches were dedicated to his memory.

Cyprian was now recalled from his banishment, and a formal trial in Carthage took place. When the trial was completed the magistrate addressed the bishop, saying:—

"Your life, Cyprian, has long been a life of sacrilege: you have gathered round you many accomplices in your crimes: you have set yourself up as an enemy to the gods of Rome, and against their sacred ceremonies: nor have the pious and greatly revered Valerian and Gallienus been able to bring you back to their religion. Therefore, I must now make an example of you before your associates in guilt, as the upholder of a great crime and as the standard-bearer of the sect. The laws must be sealed with your blood. Our sentence, therefore, is that Thascius Cyprianus be put to death with the sword." When Cyprian heard the sentence he simply answered, "Thanks be to God." Armed soldiers conducted him to the place of execution, where he asked that gold should be given to the headsman. Cyprian having put off his upper raiment stood clothed in a long white garment; and when he

stooped for death, the executioner was unnerved and could not strike. Then the centurion who led the soldiers took the axe, and with one blow severed the head from the body. Thus died Cyprian, a martyr worthy to be named with Ignatius and Polycarp.

In Spain, the most noted of those who died in the Valerian persecutions were Fructuosus, bishop of Tarragona, and his two deacons, Eulogius and Augurius. The magistrate of the city, obedient to the emperor's will, sought to compel the Christians to offer sacrifices to the gods. One night he sent his servants to seize the bishop and the deacons, who rising from bed and dressing, were led to prison. When they appeared for trial they steadfastly refused to conform to the pagan ceremonies; and at the end Fructuosus was asked, "Art thou the bishop of the Christians?" The answer was, "I am"; but the magistrate interposed, "Thou wast," and ordered him and his companions to be scourged and then burnt alive. On the road to the amphitheatre the bishop refused a cup of aromatic liquor, which might have dulled the pain. As he entered the amphitheatre he addressed the Christian people, saying, "Be of good cheer, a pastor shall not be wanting to you, nor shall the love and promise of God fail you, in the here or hereafter. For this which you behold is but the infirmity of an hour." When the fire was kindled the straps binding the hands were burnt, and Fructuosus fell on his knees, and in the attitude of prayer passed from the scene of his suffering.

Throughout the whole region of the Church, in Africa, in the West as in Italy and Spain, in the East as in Palestine and what is Asia Minor, the persecution raged. Saturninus, named the first bishop of Toulouse, was tossed to death by a bull. Eusebius tells of Priseus, Malchus, and Alexander, who, in Cæsarea in Palestine, "shone gloriously in their confession of Christ, and were honoured with divine martyrdom by becoming the food of wild beasts." At Antioch a priest named Sapricius was condemned, but as the hour of death approached he saved himself by recantation. His former friend, Nicephorous, stepped forward, and after making confession of the Name of Christ, died, lest the Faith should suffer by an instance of apostasy. In Patara, a city of Lycia, Paregorius perished for refusing to worship Serapis. Everywhere witnesses for Christ were ready when the hour for confession came.

The strange story of Chrysanthus and Daria has been assigned by many scholars to the period of Valerian. Chrysanthus, who had gone to Rome with his father Polemius, was converted by a bishop who was hiding in a cave. Polemius, in his anger, caused his son to be imprisoned, and in some way, that he might be brought back from Christianity, compelled him to marry Daria, an Athenian maiden who was a teacher of philosophy. In prison Daria herself became a Christian, and she and her husband were ultimately cast into a ditch, and buried alive. Near the spot where this martyrdom took place a

great vault was made; and in the year following its construction, a crowd of Christians gathered to honour the memory of the two saints. While the Eucharist was being celebrated, a company of soldiers approached, and finding that the Christians were openly defying the law against assemblies in burial-places, they built up the doors of the vault. Long afterwards the remains were found of the men and women who had perished, and near them the vessels of the sacred feast.

The Valerian persecution was an attempt to destroy the organisation of the Church. It was memorable by its severity and by the fact that many of the victims were notable for their ecclesiastical rank or social position. More than two hundred years had passed since the founder of Christianity had been crucified on Calvary; but time had not dulled the enthusiasm for His cause, and there were men and women as willing as those who had seen Him in the flesh to suffer or die for His Name.

Questions.

I. What was the effect of peace on the Church during the period before the Decian persecution?

II. In what way did the Decian persecution differ from the preceding persecution?

III. Give facts to show the extent of the Decian persecutions.

IV. What was the attitude of Gallus to the Church?

V. What were the contents of Valerian's edicts against the Church?

VI. Give an account of the most noted martyrs of the Valerian persecution.

CHAPTER VI

VALERIAN was taken prisoner by the king of Persia, probably in the year 260, and passed the remainder of his life in captivity. His fate was full of significance to the Church. In the east, the Egyptian Macrianus assumed the imperial dignity on the fall of his master; and continued his hostility towards the Christians, so long as he was in power. In the west, however, Gallienus, the son of Valerian, published an edict by which the Church for the first time in its history received legal recognition in the empire. The edict does not now exist, but Eusebius has given us a copy of a rescript addressed to the bishops in Egypt, which indicates how completely Gallienus had reversed his father's policy.

The rescript was as follows:—"The emperor, Cæsar Publius Licinius Gallienus Pius Felix Augustus, to Dionysius, Pinna, Demetrius, and the other bishops. The benefit of the privilege granted by me I have ordered to be issued throughout the whole world, that all may depart from their consecrated places; and therefore you also may make use of this copy of my edict, that no one may molest you. And this liberty, indeed, which you are now permitted to have, has been long since granted by me." Eusebius further states that the Roman officials were instructed to permit the visits of the Christians to the cemeteries. The Christians throughout the empire might indeed

think that the golden age of the Church had dawned, and that after the night of affliction had come the day of prosperity and peace. But the darkness had yet to deepen. Gallienus died in the year 268 from a wound received in battle.

Claudius II. followed Gallienus, and proved himself a brave soldier, under whom the fortunes of the empire revived. The early historians have not described him as a persecutor, though in the lists of the martyrs preserved in the Church and in its popular literature many of the faithful are said to have suffered in his reign. It is reported that on the 1st of March 269, two hundred and fifty perished on the Via Saleria, and that others, among whom were the son and daughter-in-law of Decius, were put to death.

In the year 270, Aurelian succeeded Claudius, and under him the prosperity of the empire continued. The son of a priestess of Mithra, a Persian deity honoured as the sun-god, Aurelian displayed a keen interest in the worship of that god, which, but for Christianity, might have come to be universally practised. Eusebius says of him: "In the progress of his reign he began to cherish different sentiments with regard to us, and then proceeded, influenced by certain advisers, to raise a persecution against us." So long as prosperity marked his rule there was no persecution; but when difficulties arose in the State his passions were roused, and the Christians must suffer. In 274 he directed an edict against them. The names of many who perished in Gaul before the edict

was published have been preserved, such as the slave Julia of Treves, but the accounts of their sufferings were written so long after their death that they cannot be viewed as historical.

Lactantius, a Christian writer, who died probably about 325, wrote that Aurelian "by deeds of cruelty irritated the divine wrath. He was not permitted to accomplish what he had devised; for just as he began to give loose to his rage he was slain. His bloody edicts had not yet reached the more distant provinces when he himself lay all bloody on the earth." For a few months after Aurelian's death the edict continued in force, and, according to tradition, many Christians perished. The Acts of these martyrs are full of legends. Mamas, for instance, a shepherd, was martyred at Cæsarea in Cappadocia, and extraordinary accounts were written of his converse with the beasts of the mountains. The fact is known, however, that he did suffer martyrdom, as in the fourth century, Basil, a well-known Christian writer, composed a homily *On Saint Mamas*.

Aurelian was assassinated in 275, and after him one emperor followed another in quick succession, till the time of Diocletian, under whom began the last general persecution of the Church. In the interval between Aurelian's death and the elevation of Diocletian, there were martyrdoms, but there was no attempt to suppress the Church. While Probus reigned, who became emperor in 276, two men perished at Antioch in Pisidia, and their death showed that local magistrates

were still free, by rescripts which had not been annulled, to order the Christians to sacrifice to the gods. It appears according to the Acts of the martyrs Trophimus and Sabbatius, that in the year 281 these two men were passing through Antioch when a festival was being held in honour of Apollo. Trophimus, indignant at the superstitions of the people, lifted up his voice to God, beseeching that they might be delivered from their errors. The people in turn were enraged, and carrying the men before the magistrate, complained that while they were singing the praises of the gods, the accused began to cry, "O Christ, deliver them from error." After the usual preliminary questions the magistrate, learning that the accused had read the ordinances of the emperor, said, "Do, then, what our sovereigns command and sacrifice to the gods." "We are not permitted," Trophimus replied, "to obey the orders of wicked and impious men, for we are Christians, servants of Jesus Christ, the great King." "You think fit, therefore, to blaspheme the emperors," said the magistrate. Thereupon Trophimus answered, "I have not blasphemed, but have spoken the truth. The impious are those who do not know the living God." At the conclusion of the trial the two men were ordered to be cast to the beasts, and when they entered the arena the beasts would not touch them. They were accordingly put to death by the executioners.

In the reign of Carinus, 284, or more probably in that of Diocletian, occurred the death of St Sebastian,

a subject frequently treated by Italian artists. Sebastian commanded the first cohort at Milan, and in the military camp was pierced to death by arrows, on account of his confession of Christ. One version of the story has it that he was left for dead in the camp. His body was sought by a pious woman named Irene, who found him still alive. Irene tended him till his wounds were healed, but he was again arrested, and was beaten to death with clubs. He became, and continues to be, the favourite saint of Italian women; and is reverenced as the protector against the plague.

Diocletian, elected emperor by the soldiers in 284, was installed at Nicomedia. In the year 286 he chose Maximianus as his colleague, styling him Cæsar and then Augustus, and giving him the command of the west, while he himself ruled in the east. A few years later, in 293, he selected two Cæsars to share in the government under the emperors. Constantius Chlorus, who governed as Cæsar in Gaul and Britain, married the step-daughter of Maximianus; while Galerius, who ruled in the provinces between the Adriatic and the Euxine, married Valeria, the daughter of Diocletian. This association, political and domestic, of Galerius with Diocletian, was to be of the direst consequences to the Christians.

In the first years of his reign Diocletian was tolerant, and in Nicomedia might be seen a church built near the palace. His wife and daughters, it was believed, were Christians; and in the city and court Christians were everywhere to be found. Opposition to the

Church was not dead, however; and while the old crass paganism failed to attract the men of education, there were many who professed what has been styled the new or Platonic paganism. These men, of whom was Hierocles, author of *Words of a truth-lover to the Christians*, looked on the supernatural elements in Christianity as superstitions, and were ready to disparage the Faith in the ears of the emperor. And to a ruler anxious to secure the unity of the empire, it was easy to represent as dangerous the Christian community which would not render to him undivided allegiance.

The separation of the Christians was more marked in the army than in civil life, and since they would not join in the sacrifices, it could well be shown that military discipline was all but impossible. The military difficulty was exemplified in a case which occurred in 295, when the pro-consul of Nicomedia was levying troops. A young man named Maximilian, when he came before the pro-consul, said, "I may not serve, because I am a Christian." The refusal was not heeded, and he pled, "I cannot possibly serve: I cannot do what is wrong: I am a Christian." He was ordered to take the emblem of service and to enlist. "I shall do nothing of the sort," said the young man, "I already wear the emblem of Christ my God." The pro-consul, as determined as the youth, ordered his attendants to hang the badge on the neck of Maximilian; but he was answered, "I refuse to take the badge of a worldly warfare. It is of no use. I shall tear it off. I

cannot possibly wear this bit of lead, after accepting the saving emblem of my Lord Jesus Christ, who has suffered for our salvation, though you know Him not." In the end the youth was beheaded; and while his courage must be admired, his determination to seek martyrdom must be recognised as fanaticism, since many Christians were able without hurt to their consciences to serve in the imperial army. The case of Marcellus, a centurion, was different. He resigned his position in the army, rather than engage in a sacrifice. His action was treated as a breach of military discipline, and he was executed. Cassian, one of the legal officers engaged in the case, declared the sentence to be unjust, and he too was put to death.

In one of the campaigns Diocletian was able to mark for himself the disobedience of the Christians. The pagan priests, who as usual sought to read the omens, pretended to be unable to find any signs; and the silence of the gods, they represented, was due to anger against the Christians. The emperor was enraged. He commanded the Christians to join in the sacrifices, or to be scourged; and sent letters to his officers bidding them expel from their companies those who would not obey.

Within the domestic circle of the palace forces were at work to prejudice the emperor. The mother of Galerius was devoted to the worship of some pagan deity, probably Cybele, and every day offered a sacrifice and prepared a banquet, to which the members of the court were invited. When the Christians would not

attend these banquets, she persuaded her son to induce Diocletian to crush them as enemies of religion. The emperor agreed that a council should deliberate regarding action, but as a final precaution desired that one of the famous oracles should be consulted.

The answer was not difficult to prepare. The oracles, it was announced, could not be relied on to speak the truth on account of the presence of the Christians in the empire. Diocletian was now convinced that action must be taken, but, in opposition to Galerius, who wished to burn alive all who refused to sacrifice, he commanded that there should be no punishment by death. Not unlikely his wife and daughter were responsible for this command.

On one of the great Roman feast days, February 23rd, in the year 303, the persecution began. The doors of the church of Nicomedia were thrown down, and search was made in vain for an image of the Christians' god. The sacred books were burned, and the furniture of the building was removed. Diocletian and Galerius watching from the palace the work of destruction, saw the church rased to the ground by the pioneers of the Prætorian guard. On the following morning an edict was published, requiring all churches to be destroyed, all sacred books to be burnt, and all Christians who were officials to be deprived of their civil rights, and those who were not officials to be reduced to slavery. The copy of the edict which was posted in a public place in Nicomedia, was torn down by a man, who was put to death by slow burning. The breaker of the

law was probably the man who came to be known as St George of Nicomedia, in whose story some have found the beginning of the legend of St George of England.

Shortly after the publication of the edict a fire broke out in the imperial palace, and at once the Christians were blamed. The rage of Diocletian knew no bounds, and Galerius, to foster that rage, left Nicomedia, declaring that his life was not safe. The wife and daughter of the emperor were forced to sacrifice; certain officers of the palace were put to death; while the bishop of Nicomedia was beheaded. Throughout the city and the province the persecution spread. Some were beheaded, some burnt alive, and some drowned; while others perished in dungeons. By a second edict, all clerical officers of the Church were to be imprisoned, without even the opportunity of sacrificing. A third edict appeared, by which liberty was offered to those who would sacrifice, and torture threatened to those who refused. Letters were addressed by Diocletian to his colleague Maximian and to Cæsar Constantius. Maximian was willing to enforce the edicts with ruthless severity, but Constantius, a man of milder character, was content to destroy the churches, while he sought to spare the lives of the Christians.

Thanks to the mercy of Constantius the persecution did not pass like a plague through Gaul and Britain, but in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Western Africa, Italy and Spain, horrible methods of torture were contrived,

and diverse manners of death employed, to secure the destruction of the Church of Christ. Eusebius relates with horrible details the story of one of the first martyrs of Nicomedia. The man was led to the middle of the city to appear before the emperor. "He was then commanded to sacrifice, but as he refused, he was ordered to be stripped and lifted on high, and to be scourged with rods over his whole body, until he should be subdued in his resolution, and forced to do what he was commanded. But as he was unmovable amid all these sufferings, his bones already appearing bared of the flesh, they mixed vinegar with salt, and poured it upon the mangled parts of the body. But as he bore these tortures, a grid-iron and fire were produced, and the remnants of his body, like pieces of meat for roasting and eating, were placed on the fire, not at once, so that he might not expire soon, but taken by little and little, whilst his torturers were not permitted to let him alone, unless after these sufferings he breathed his last before they had completed their task. He, however, persevered in his purpose, and gave up his life, victorious in the midst of his tortures. Such was the martyrdom of one of the imperial domestics, worthy in reality of his name, for he was called Peter."

To the earlier years of the reign of Diocletian, the martyrdoms of St Maurice and the Theban legion at Martigny, of St Victor at Marseilles, and of the saints Cosmos and Damian in Celicia have been referred, but the stories are filled with such extraordinary legendary

details that the truth connected with the martyrdoms cannot be discovered. There was suffering in the Diocletian persecution more than enough to satisfy the grimmest imagination, and there was no need for legend to touch the actual records of the tragic fate of the great band of witnesses for the Faith. The Theban legion, according to the story, being composed of Christians, 6600 in number, refused to obey the command of Maximian to join in the persecution of their brethren. The emperor thereupon ordered the legion to be decimated, and again to be decimated, and at last every man of it, with Maurice the officer in charge, to be put to death. Even the story of Albanus, styled the protomartyr of Britain, is doubtful; and certainly none of the versions can be altogether accepted as true. The legend is that he died at Verulamium during the time of Diocletian. He was a heathen, it is told, and against the law sheltered a Christian priest who was fleeing from persecution. Clad in the priest's robe he was taken before a magistrate and confessing himself a Christian, though unbaptized, and refusing to sacrifice, was condemned to be scourged and beheaded. Albanus, it appears, was able to perform miracles. He divided the waters of a river, and caused a fountain to spring up to quench his thirst. His intended executioner was converted and died with him, while the eyes of the man who beheaded him dropped out.

Towards the close of the year 303, Diocletian celebrated in Rome the twentieth year of his reign, and

during the rejoicings there was a respite for the Christians. But the peace did not endure, as in 304 Maximian issued an edict making death the punishment of Christianity. In a short time, too, important political events left Galerius supreme in the East. In 305 Diocletian and Maximian abdicated. Galerius and the Cæsar Maximian were determined to crush the Church, but in the west Constantius and the Cæsar Severus were tolerant. Change after change in the government was to take place before the year 311, in which the persecution was to cease. In 308 the harshest of all the edicts was issued, and from that year till the time of peace, during the period described as "a perfect reign of terror," the greatest number of the victims perished.

Constantius was merciful, but of the other three imperial rulers Lactantius wrote: "So the whole earth was agitated; and, Gaul alone excepted, from the east even unto the west was felt the savagery of the most rancorous beasts."

Of martyrdom in this last fierce persecution, innumerable instances might be quoted. Forty-nine martyrs suffered in one company in Abitina, in Africa, where Maximian was supreme. The story is that a party of worshippers were surprised, as they were assembled under the leadership of a senator named Dativus, and were arrested and taken to Carthage. Dativus was the first to be questioned. He admitted that he was a Christian, and when he was about to be tortured, in order that the name of the ringleader might be forced

from him, another man cried out, "We are all Christians; it was we who held the meeting." This man was put on the rack, and he named the priest Saturninus as the ringleader, but added, "and all the rest," wishing to share responsibility. A young pagan advocate now preferred a charge against Dativus, that he had been the means of abducting his sister Victoria and two other maidens from his father's house. Victoria, one of the prisoners, asserted, "No one persuaded me to run away. . . . I did it all at my own prompting, for I have always attended the meeting, and kept the Dominicum with my brethren, because I am a Christian." Man after man was tortured, and each determined to share the responsibility of the meeting. The priest declared that they had celebrated the Lord's ordinance, "because the Lord's ordinance cannot possibly be intermitted." When the examination of the maidens began, Victoria was asked if she would go with her brother. "I will not," she said, "for I am a Christian, and my brethren are they who keep the commandments of God." At last all were sentenced to death, save a young boy, the son of the priest Saturninus. Asked regarding the meeting, he answered, "I am a Christian: at my own desire and of my own free will I joined in the service with my father and the brethren." The magistrate, trying to frighten the boy, said, "I shall cut off all your long hair, and your nose and your ears, and then turn you out." "You can do what you like, for I am a Christian," the boy replied, and when sentence of

death was pronounced he cried, "Thanks be to God."

The character of Galerius may be seen from his treatment of one of the deacons of Cæsarea. The Roman magistrate condemned this man Romanus to be burned for rebuking certain Christians whom he saw conforming to the order to sacrifice. It was at that time illegal to sentence him to death, as the imperial edict did not give sanction, but Galerius ordered that his tongue should be cut out, and that he be imprisoned. Eusebius thus describes the condition of the Christians in Africa when the edict had been published which made Christianity a crime deserving death:—

"Thousands, both men and women and children, despising the present life for the sake of our Saviour's doctrine, submitted to death in various shapes. Some, after being tortured with scrapings and the rack, and the most dreadful scourgings, and other innumerable agonies, which one might shudder to hear, were finally committed to the flames; some plunged and drowned in the sea, others voluntarily offering their own heads to the executioners, others dying in the midst of their torments, some wasted away by famine, and others again, fixed to the cross. Some, indeed, were executed as malefactors usually were; others more cruelly were nailed with the head downwards, and kept alive until they were destroyed by starving on the cross itself."

Wherever the persecution raged, every class of the Christian community was attacked. Eusebius tells of

town in Phrygia which was destroyed, "because all the inhabitants, even the very governor and magistrate, with all the men of rank and the whole people, confessed themselves Christians." Peter, the archbishop of Alexandria, was beheaded "without any reason assigned." Lucian, a priest of Antioch and a distinguished scholar, was also beheaded. Vincentius, archdeacon of Saragossa, was imprisoned, tortured, and put to death. Silvanus, the bishop, was "cast as food to the wild beasts at Emisa." Silvanus, "bishop of the churches about Gaza," was put to death with thirty-nine companions, at the copper mines of Phœno. Apart from ecclesiastics, Eusebius speaks of men who "were distinguished for wealth and noble birth and great reputation and excelled in philosophy and learning, and who still regarded all as but secondary to the true religion and faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Women were not spared. The Seven Martyrs of Ancyra were seven old women who were called on to wash the statues of Diana and Minerva, as if they were priestesses. When they refused they were carried naked through the streets of Ancyra to a lake where they were drowned. Euphemia after tortures was thrown to the beasts at Ephesus. Agnes, a girl of twelve years of age, was beheaded at Rome for refusing to sacrifice.

Boys, too, were among the victims. Pancratius, or Pancras in the English form, was a Phrygian by birth who was baptized at Rome by the bishop. When only fourteen years of age he suffered death, along with his

uncle Dionysius, in the imperial city. Legend tells that his tomb, which was outside the walls of Rome, was gifted with such powers that perjurers, if they swore falsely before it, were at once seized by the devil.

In the year 311 Galerius, sinking under a loathsome disease, completely changed his policy. Under his own name and those of Licinius and Constantine, son and successor of Constantius, he published an edict of toleration. Remorse may have seized him, but more probably he hoped in his extremity to secure the help of the God of the Christians. In the proclamation Galerius very strongly represented himself as a reformer and not as a persecutor. His words were:—"Amongst the other schemes we are for ever framing for the use and profit of the State, we for our part had some time been minded to reform all things after the ancient laws and public discipline of the Romans, and to take order that the Christians also, who had left the persuasion of their own fathers, should return to a good disposition: forasmuch as, by logic of a peculiar kind, so great wilfulness had entered into the said Christians, and such folly had possessed them, that they would not follow those very instructions of the ancients, which had peradventure been first established by the said persons' own forefathers, but according to their own private judgment, each man after his own caprice, and on no other principle, they made their laws for themselves, and these they observed, and congregated in separate places, dissenting assemblies. In brief,

therefore, when a decree of ours had been set forth to that effect, that they should betake themselves again to the institution of the ancients, many persons were put under jeopardy, many also utterly crushed down : and when the majority of them persevered in their resolution, and we saw that the said persons neither displayed to the gods the worship and reverence that were due, nor paid heed to the God of the Christians, we, in consideration of our most humane clemency, and having regard to the invariable use by which we are wont to accord mercy to all mankind alike, have thought best in this case also to extend our most prompt indulgence ; that Christianity may once more be preached, and that they may build their conventicles, on condition that they do nothing to break the discipline. And we are about to signify to the judges in another despatch what rule that is that they are to observe. Therefore, over against this our indulgence, it will be their duties to pray to their God for our health, and the health of the State, and of themselves, that on all sides the State may be found in good condition, and that they may be able to live without anxieties in their own homes."

Maximin, the fiercest of the imperial persecutors, though he did not sign the proclamation issued by Galerius, gave orders that toleration should be extended to the Christians. This toleration, however, had only a short duration, as six months after its inauguration he required that all his subjects, even infants, should offer sacrifices; and in his hatred of

Christianity he caused a forgery, known as the *Acts of Pilate*, to be circulated, in which were foul and blasphemous charges against the Saviour.

Political changes in the empire occurred in rapid succession, and tended to the peace of the Church. In the year 312, Maxentius was overthrown in the west by Constantine, and in the east, in the following year, Licinius defeated Maximin. The victors were both at first friendly towards the Church, and together they issued the Edict of Milan, 313, declaring that no one was to be hindered from the profession of the Christian or other religion.

A remarkable story is told by Eusebius in reference to the contest between Constantine and Maxentius. When Constantine learned that Maxentius was preparing for battle by employing magical ceremonies, he determined to seek supernatural aid for himself. He remembered the Supreme Being honoured by his father, Constantius; and, when deliberating the subject in his mind, he saw in the sky a luminous cross with the words, "By this conquer." The emperor fell asleep, and as he slept, the Saviour appeared in a vision, bearing the symbol of the cross, and bidding him use it as his standard, and assuring him of victory. When the emperor awoke, he gave orders for the preparation of a banner on which was designed the cross with the first letters of the Saviour's name. Under its protection Constantine won the battle of the Milvian Bridge against Maxentius; and in the struggle against the forces of Licinius, victory

lay with the soldiers of the cross. After the triumph over Licinius, 323 or 324, Constantine, by an edict, addressed to the whole empire, advised his subjects to embrace Christianity, and he himself bestowed many favours on the Church. The long series of persecutions was at an end. The Roman Empire was at last ruled by a man who named the name of Christ. Church and State were reconciled, and in 325, when the first General Council of the Church met at Nicea, the emperor was in attendance.

Dean Stanley, describing that Council, and, in the first instance, the older and larger part of that assembly, says: "They had lived through the last and worst of the persecutions, and they now came like a regiment out of some frightful siege or battle, decimated and mutilated by the tortures or the hardships they had undergone. There must have been some of the aged inhabitants of Nicæa who remembered the death of the two martyrs, Tryphon and Respicius, who, in the reign of Decius, had been dragged through the streets of the city, bleeding from their wounds, in the depth of winter. There must be some who retained from their grandfathers the recollections of that still earlier and more celebrated persecution in Bithynia, recorded by Pliny in his letters to Trajan. Most of the older members must have lost a friend or brother. Many still bore the marks of their sufferings. Some uncovered their sides and backs to show the wounds inflicted by the instruments of torture. On others were the traces of

that peculiar cruelty which distinguished the last persecution, the loss of a right eye, or the severing of the sinews of the leg, to prevent their escape from working in the mines."

It is impossible to discover, since no records were kept, the number of the martyrs who perished throughout the ages of persecution; nor is it possible to examine the motives of all who died rather than yield to apostasy from the Faith. The great Tertullian declared that, while it is not the general lot of the dead in Christ to become at once dwellers in His presence, it is the prerogative of the saint through martyrdom to obtain at once a lodging in Paradise. Gibbon, in modern times, has asserted with exuberance of rhetoric that the Christian teachers, "inculcated with becoming diligence, that the fire of martyrdom supplied every defect and expiated every sin." It may be that into the motives of some of the martyrs there crept that "other-worldliness" which finds no place among the virtues extolled in the Sermon on the Mount; but when all is said that can take away from the nobility of the martyrs, everything regarding selfish purposes and extravagant enthusiasm and wanton provocation, there remains the stupendous fact that in every age of the early Church, even when the tragedy of Calvary was a distant memory, men were ready to confess the Name of Jesus, bearing every consequence, and for the sake of the Faith to yield all the treasures of this life, and to go into the unseen world. With justice and toleration we seek

to judge the emperors who opposed the Christians as enemies of the State, and see in the greatest of these rulers men swayed by a passion for the imperial tradition. With justice, no less demanded, we count the martyrs noble witnesses for truth, and see in them men ready to bear everything, even torture, and to yield all, even life, in love to Christ.

Questions.

I. Show how the Church received legal recognition under Gallienus.

II. What was the attitude of Aurelian towards the Christians?

III. What is the story of St Sebastian, of the Theban legion, of St Albanus, and of St Pancras?

IV. Under what influences did Diocletian inaugurate the persecution?

V. What was the character of Galerius? What were the terms of the edict of 311?

VI. What were the main political events which affected the Church in the period from the edict of Galerius to the Council of Nicæa?

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